Ofsted 2005 : a new relationship with primary headteachers?

Thesis

Yvonne Joy Watts MEd, BA(Hons)

Ofsted 2005:
A New Relationship with
Primary Headteachers?

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, my husband Stuart, son Thomas, and daughters Josephine and Elizabeth, for their support and encouragement during my studies. Also to my parents, Rosemary and Ron, for their belief in me.

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ABSTRACT

This study concerns the role of the English primary school headteacher within the school inspection process, specifically after the implementation of the key changes made by Ofsted to their inspection framework in 2005. These amendments were considerable, and included moving to shorter inspections with less notice given, alongside schools being required to undertake self-evaluation to inform the inspectorate. Much of a primary school's self-evaluation falls to the headteacher and the study focuses on the implications of Ofsted's New Relationship with Schools for the head.

Mixed methods are used for the study. A questionnaire survey was sent to all 749 primary headteachers whose schools were inspected in November 2006 and follow-up interviews were carried out with a sample of these. The extent of a head's autonomy is considered, to investigate whether variations in approach make any difference to the outcomes for a school. This practitioner study is undertaken by a serving primary headteacher which helps inform the research focus and data analysis. It includes some personal reflection from the researcher, including a consideration of the implications of the research on her professional role.

The findings indicate that the primary headteachers in the study believe the new inspection process to have both advantages and disadvantages. Although there is some criticism of Ofsted, most heads recognise the need to be accountable, even though multiple accountabilities to a variety of stakeholders weigh heavily for some. The study concludes that the respondent heads who approach the inspection process with confidence and belief in their school and its practices may help to support a positive outcome by ensuring the school will be seen in the best light possible. This finding may be of interest to primary headteachers and could help to inform their professional practice.

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CHAPTER 1

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SETTING THE SCENE

INTRODUCTION

Primary schools hold a special niche in England. Their fundamental purpose is to commence the formal education of our children, to provide them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to move towards becoming fully functioning members of society. Over recent decades the expectations of what is taught, how and why, have changed. Schools are measured on their performance and the achievements of their pupils, which have considerable implications for a school's success and its standing in the community. Understandably, there are many people with a vested interest in how schools are functioning. These stakeholders include the headteacher and other adults working in a school, the pupils and their parents, the governing body, and more officially, the local authority and the state represented by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). This public office was instigated in the early 1990s, with its principle aim being to ensure schools are performing to national expectations.

It is apparent there is potential for tension in endeavouring to satisfy all of these internal and external parties with an interest in a school. However, the stakes are most notably raised by the inspection process, as the effectiveness of each school and the outcomes of its pupils are evaluated, with successes and failures publicly announced, which can have a considerable effect on the subsequent fate of a school, its staff and pupils, but in particular its headteacher.

This first chapter helps to set the scene for the study, by providing a brief historical account of school inspection and the changing impetus which led to the introduction of the inspection body, Ofsted, and later its New Relationship with Schools. Definitions of the key concepts identified are noted, these include descriptions of performativity, school effectiveness, the primary school and its leader. The researcher's background, as a primary headteacher, is also outlined. Chapter 1 concludes with detail of the conceptual framework and the three research questions designed to help structure the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study investigates the implications of the inspection process for primary headteachers in England and the relationship they share

with Ofsted. It is specifically concerned with the effect of the changes brought by Ofsted following their New Relationship with Schools (NRwS) initiative, which was introduced in 2005. Initial research identifies that primary headteachers play a pivotal part in the inspection process, and it was decided to explore the concepts from their perspective. Crawford (2009:15) makes the pertinent comment that "educational leadership literature rarely considers headship from the perspective of the headteacher". It is hoped this study may, in a small way, redress this and help to inform the approach to inspection adopted by primary heads in the future.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A brief history

The first schools were gradually introduced in England many centuries ago. Inspection of schools was later initiated to verify what school staff were doing, what was being taught and whether pupils were learning. The first two school inspectors, known as His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs), were appointed in 1833. As time progressed, the inspection process became increasingly more structured and official, although MacBeath (2006a:38) suggests that up until the late twentieth century school inspection was a relatively uncontroversial topic.

Ever since schools came into existence, headteachers have been appointed to lead them and to ensure their organisation and efficacy. Kent (1989:9) discusses how the role of the head or school leader has evolved over time, and even proved a challenge to some of the world's "noblest intellects". He describes how Robert Owen the social reformer, Benjamin Franklin the statesman, and Froebel who introduced the kindergarten, all opened their own schools and struggled to lead them successfully.

Brundrett (1999:2) argues that the role of headteacher became more formalised in the late twentieth century, due to an increasing recognition that quality school leadership is fundamental to all aspects of a school's success. Cullingford (1999:3) notes the irony that because school staff, and in particular the headteacher, have been found to be of significance to an effective school, this has made them the prime focus of the inspection process. It is further apparent that even what constitutes the success of a school has changed over recent decades. Cullingford (1999:3) concurs that although there is a general consensus about which factors are important, these are far more complicated and harder to measure than a brief, external inspection may identify. Ball (2003:216) describes the introduction of a culture of performativity in the 1990s, when public sector organisations became increasingly measured by methods similar to

those used in the private sector. For education, this meant a new emphasis on the performance of individual pupils, so that comparisons and judgements could be made between schools.

Performativity

The term 'performativity' was introduced by Lyotard (1984:88), when he identified that society had become preoccupied with measuring effectiveness by an input/output ratio. There is arguably even more emphasis on performativity in the early 21st Century, with individuals in many walks of life having to prove themselves and their actions against measurable targets. More recently, Perryman defines performativity as:

> A disciplinary technology that uses judgements and comparisons against what is seen as efficient as a means of control. A culture of performativity leads to performances that measure efficiency. (Perryman, 2009:617)

This interpretation suggests the elements of discipline and control will have considerable implications for schools, as the expectations of illustrating efficiency are likely to impinge on much of school life, with staff and pupils having to prove their worth. It is evident the current inspection regime fits this understanding, and in the two

decades since Ofsted was introduced the inspection process has become an intrinsic part of education in England.

There are, of course, positive aspects to having such measures in place, not least that the government will feel well informed as to how effectively public monies are being spent and parents can exercise some freedom to choose between different schools. Another advantage of working within a performativity culture is that it is considered fair and objective, although Ball argues that:

> Performativity appears as misleadingly objective and hyper-rational. (Ball, 2003:217)

This suggests that there will be some disadvantages to having a reliance on performativity measures to make judgements about individual schools. It is clear that all schools are different, they operate in unique situations and varying circumstances, with wildly diverse catchment areas, thus it is problematic to make objective comparisons, although this is precisely what Ofsted has to do.

Ofsted

The non-ministerial government department of Ofsted was formed under the Education (Schools) Act 1992, as part of the major overhaul

of the school system instigated by the Education Reform Act 1988. At this time, the National Curriculum was introduced to provide a consistent approach for all schools, which included extensive testing and the publication of league tables to show the results of statutory assessment tests (SATs) at the end of each key stage of education, together with public examinations at the end of compulsory schooling. Earley and Weindling (2004:87) describe how the reforms began to reallocate the balance of responsibility for managing schools away from Local Authorities, which are the county or district councils responsible for distributing public funds. Some of this control was given to the headteacher and governors of maintained schools, under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) system which was part of the 1988 reforms, although this was offset against overall accountability being afforded to Ofsted. Cullingford makes the telling observation that after the reforms:

> Power lies not in the hands of those who are delivering the education system but in the inspectors. (Cullingford, 1999:2)

This quotation encapsulates the dominance of the Ofsted inspection process, which has been one of the most notable changes to late twentieth century education in England. Terrell and Terrell (1999:103) emphasize the highly complex task that school leaders were then faced with, by locally managing a school whilst trying to

balance school improvement and financial targets alongside staff development and Ofsted action plans.

The reforms fundamentally meant that individual schools received greater autonomy, but this was counterbalanced with increased accountability and more prescribed performance measures. Thomson (2009:115) describes the changes as "both a re- and de-centralization"; with the curriculum being centralized at the same time as functions such as staffing, school maintenance and budgeting became the responsibility of individual schools. It is thus understandable that the expectations of introducing a national standard for the curriculum, detailing the acceptable academic levels to be reached by pupils, led to a greater impetus to inspection as there was increased scope for comparisons to be made between schools. On a simplistic level, all schools were providing a similar 'input', which should have resulted in a similar 'output'. This put schools and their headteachers under increasing pressure to maintain accepted benchmarks, whilst running what was essentially a business, which had to demonstrate value for money with its public funding.

Jeffrey argues that one of the most noteworthy changes to inspection due to the performativity culture was that it:

> Changed teacher-inspection relations from one of partnership to one of subjugation....it's an 'us and them'. (Jeffrey, 2002:541)

This comment highlights the intrinsic tension between the key players in the inspection process, although Jeffrey was writing prior to NRwS, which has aimed to help redress this balance and to build a more positive relationship between inspectors and school staff.

Ofsted's New Relationship with Schools

In 2005, Ofsted introduced a new framework for school inspections, entitled NRwS. The Department for Education and Skills (DFES, 2004:12) outlines the main reasoning behind the changes. The salient features are detailed below:

- Simplification of the inspection process, which had become a lengthy and quite unwieldy process, generally held at approximately six yearly intervals. Under the new framework, inspections were planned every three years but with far less notice given to schools, typically about two or three days as opposed to six to eight weeks under the previous system.

- Regular scheduled inspections to be known as Section 5 Inspections, named after that section of Chapter 18 of the

Education Act 2005 (Education Act, 2005). Schools could also receive follow-up inspections after not meeting accepted standards, or specific subject surveys, although these are not included in this study.

- Schools demonstrating their capability to be accountable to a range of stakeholders, by providing evidence of successes and showing that strategies were in place to improve areas identified for development. This was termed "intelligent accountability" by Ofsted. (DFES, 2004:4)

- Headteachers being encouraged to undertake self-evaluation of their school, with the aim of helping school improvement, rather than solely for the purposes of inspection.

- Heads being required to record a summary of the self-evaluation process via an online Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), which amounted to upwards of 30 pages of information. Notably, the SEF could only be accessed by Ofsted and the relevant school, and formed the basis of the new inspection process.

In practice, NRwS meant that schools, leadership teams and headteachers in particular, became responsible for much of their own

monitoring and evaluation, with inspectors visiting to verify the school's own assessment of its strengths and areas identified for development. Thus, the New Relationship can be considered an attempt to personalise the demands of performativity, by allowing schools and their headteachers some input and autonomy in the inspection process. MacBeath (2006a:2) describes the government's motives for NRwS and their pronouncement that it was a positive move, promising schools greater freedoms and reduced bureaucracy. Although, Perryman (2009:614) argues that because inspection is designed to gather knowledge about schools, then "it must be intrinsically linked to power". The connotation of power in this context does imply there is still some capitulation necessary on the part of schools, as earlier described by Cullingford (1999:2), which may be perceived as oppressive.

Recording of a school's self-evaluation is achieved by completion of the SEF, which provides a framework for schools to record their appraisals. At the time of the data collection for this study, the SEF had seven main sections, and many sub-sections, all focusing upon different aspects of the self-evaluation process. MacBeath stresses that:

> The SEF is a critical document in the new inspection process.....getting it wrong will be used by Ofsted as

> a contra-indication of good leadership and management. (MacBeath, 2006a:109)

It is, therefore, apparent that although schools are allowed greater autonomy with their self-evaluation feeding into the inspection process, this proves to be tightly structured within the SEF template. Moreover, the quality of the SEF itself has extensive implications for the headteacher, as it is used by inspectors to judge the quality of their leadership. In effect, headteachers are being expected to inspect themselves, which MacBeath (2006a:57) describes as "taking on the guise of self-inspection". Indeed, the original guidance stresses that:

> A robust and professional SEF will virtually amount to the school's own inspection report on itself. (DFES, 2004:12)

This quotation has proved of particular significance to the study, the implications behind it underpin the main concepts explored and helped to frame the research questions.

MacBeath (2006a:17) describes that schools initially gave NRwS a "cautious welcome", with a sense of optimism that schools and their heads would have more input into the inspection process and were to be more trusted than previously. However, due to the implications of 'getting it wrong', writing the SEF is considered particularly daunting by some headteachers. Thomson (2009:117)

argues that completion of the SEF has proved extremely demanding of a headteacher's time and led to a "continuous pressure" for schools to perform, being aligned with standards-based quality systems in industry. The approach clearly has parallels with private sector performativity measures, which focus both on outcomes and the ongoing processes used.

Defining a primary school

The focus of this study is the English maintained primary school, so it is important to identify exactly which type of schools this encompasses. Maintained primary schools in England can be defined as those where there is no fee for pupils to attend, with their funding provided by the state. Primary schooling starts for children at four years old and generally continues until they reach the age of eleven, when they move on to secondary school. There are three key stages covering the primary years, firstly foundation stage up to age five, key stage one from five to seven years and key stage two from seven to eleven years. Some schools cater for just one key stage within this range, and are classified as either an infant or junior school.

Generally, each primary school will have its own headteacher, although on occasion the role can be shared and, increasingly, some heads may lead more than one establishment.

School effectiveness and improvement

Primary schools are encouraged to be effective and to look constantly to improve the service they provide, that is the education of the nation's children. Davies and Davies (2005:10) outline that the key focuses for schools in the past two decades have been school effectiveness and school improvement, although Wrigley (2003:109) argues the two terms should not be merged and are distinct paradigms.

Striving for school effectiveness can be perceived as endeavouring to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils and adding the most value from their starting points. Stoll and Mortimore define an effective school as:

> One in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. (Stoll and Mortimore, 1997:18)

Many lists of key features common to effective schools have been produced over recent years, these typically include having a positive

learning environment, clear sanction and reward systems, academic emphasis and good home-school partnerships. One of the earliest influential studies was carried out by Rutter *et al* (1979), who researched 12 London secondary schools and drew up a list of desirable characteristics. Since then, many researchers (for example, Barber *et al*, 1995, and Peters and Waterman, 1982) have produced similar lists, although increasingly the importance of school leadership has also been included. Indeed, Ouston (2003:253), a member of Rutter *et al*'s original team, notes her amazement that headteachers only received a cursory mention in their research. This highlights the fundamental shift in English schools since the late 1970s, with headteachers gaining more authority and autonomy since LMS was introduced.

School improvement, in contrast, can be broadly considered the actions and aspirations necessary for a school to become effective. A definition from Hopkins *et al* helps to clarify the term, as:

> A distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. (Hopkins *et al*, 1994:3)

It is apparent here that dealing with change is intrinsic to a school being able to improve, indeed Bennett describes school improvement as focusing on:

> The need to change the culture of the school if improvements are to occur. (Bennett, 2003:44)

In simplistic terms, then, school effectiveness can be considered the measurement and recognition of what a school has achieved, whilst school improvement is concerned with identifying what a school must do or change to be effective, and aspiring to achieve this. Bennett (2003:44) argues the concepts should complement each other, but that in practice they do not. He distinguishes between school effectiveness focusing on a school's structure, including physical, work and task structures, whilst school improvement is concerned with changing the culture. From this perspective, an effective school can be achieved by ensuring all aspects of the structure are in place, whereas for school improvement to happen, there must be a greater shift of traditions and values within the organisation. Stoll (2003:95) agrees that although the desire to change schools by improving their provision is well embedded in the education system, the culture and beliefs of the adults working within a school will make a difference to how this is approached.

It is acknowledged that school effectiveness and school improvement are distinct from each other and both of great significance to contemporary education, however the limitations of this study necessitate the main focus to be on school effectiveness, although some reference will be made to the latter. This was deemed most appropriate as judgement of a school's effectiveness is the main evaluation made under the current inspection regime, which Stoll and Mortimore (1997:18) succinctly describe as "the final picture".

The part primary heads play

There are numerous expectations on the primary headteacher in order to meet Ofsted's requirements under NRwS, alongside doing the 'day job' of running a school. These tasks include preparing for an inspection by instigating the school's self-evaluation and documenting it on the SEF, which informs an inspection team prior to a visit. The first blank SEF template was published in mid 2005 with minimal guidance on how to complete it. MacBeath describes how:

> The summer of 2005 saw a flurry of activity as many English headteachers spent their summer holidays hurriedly completing the SEF in case of a drop-in visit. (MacBeath, 2006a:109)

Other expectations of the head in relation to school inspection include working closely with the Ofsted team during the inspection itself, whilst supporting colleagues and other stakeholders throughout the process. Follow-up tasks will also be the responsibility of the headteacher to effect, and they will be personally named in the published inspection report, so it is evident there are quite specific demands on one person. Notably, Crawford (2009:5) highlights the vulnerability of English headteachers under the current system, as they can be personally held liable for the successes or failures of their school.

The researcher's background

I was appointed to primary headship in late 2004, shortly before the introduction of Ofsted's NRwS. Local authority training for heads at this time outlined that the previous framework was mainly concerned with teaching whilst the new inspection system would focus on the headteacher and a school's leadership. This appeared somewhat ironical for a new head who had been a class teacher under the previous regime! The change of emphasis struck me as crucial to my new role and sparked my interest to research the updated inspection process and its implications for primary headteachers.

The expectation within the new framework to complete an online SEF marked a considerable shift in the process, with a school's internal evaluations feeding directly into the information supplied to inspectors. Furthermore, the relevance of the written content and the evaluations made were used by Ofsted to help make a judgement on the quality of a school's leadership and management. In a small primary school, it was quickly apparent that the majority of the SEF writing would be my personal responsibility. In addition, headteachers were also to be invited to take part in joint lesson observations with inspectors, to verify the accuracy of their evaluations.

As a new head, it would be fair to say that I was quite overawed by these expectations and recognised that the primary headteacher would need to play a pivotal role in school in order to fulfil NRwS requirements. However, in discussions with local colleagues, I was surprised by the variety of opinions voiced by other heads. These ranged from those who seemed almost terrified by the prospect, to those who took a laid-back approach, through those who were quite compliant and immediately looked for ways to achieve the best outcome, to those who appeared somewhat belligerent about the changes in expectations. From the observation of such varying approaches by fellow heads, the theme of my research developed as I

sought to investigate what the consequences of the New Relationship may be for primary headteachers and whether the approach they chose to take might have any influence on their school's inspection.

My own school was inspected in November 2006, and although a demanding experience, I was pleasantly surprised when we received a grading of outstanding. This judgement has had a number of positive repercussions since, including the school being consistently over-subscribed with a positive local reputation. In addition, I have had the opportunity to be designated as a National College Local Leader of Education and help support other headteachers and schools. My school is also recognised as a Leadership Development School, which means we regularly have National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) candidates undertaking their placements in school. I recognise these public affirmations have been influenced by our inspection judgement and have helped to empower me as a school leader. Notably, Robinson (2011:77) identifies the "earned autonomy" that a headteacher can enjoy, as a type of credibility when his or her school receives a successful inspection. However, as a farmer's daughter, I also fully understand the importance of 'making hay whilst the sun shines', and have actively sought such opportunities to enhance my school and its reputation whilst this judgement stands. Conversely, I

acknowledge the vagaries of the current inspection system, and recognise that many schools have not faired as well as my own under NRwS, which may have resulted in negative consequences for some schools and their headteachers. A further concern is that, under subsequent inspection frameworks, Ofsted's goalposts may move which could lead to my own school changing its status. I have to question whether this would make a difference to my pupils' learning, although being frank, it is concerns such as this which can keep me awake at night.

My aim in this study is to investigate the inspection process and the relationship that heads have with the inspectorate, from the standpoint of a practising headteacher, endeavouring to present a balanced view, with the acknowledgement that there can be both negative and positive implications for schools and their leaders.

IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH AREAS

A number of concepts have been identified to frame the study. Firstly, school effectiveness and its place in a culture of performativity are considered. The concept of role is then explored, and more specifically the school leadership role undertaken by primary headteachers, particularly in relation to the part they play in

the inspection process and the extent of any autonomy they may bring to this aspect of their role.

Accountability is another important concept identified. A school and its headteacher are accountable to a range of stakeholders, including pupils and their families, the governing body and the wider community. In addition, schools are also accountable to the financiers of that service, this essentially means the tax payer, whose 'representatives' are the local authority and central government, with Ofsted being their agents.

Finally, the concept of evaluation is explored. The study focuses on two types of evaluation carried out in primary schools, namely inspection and self-evaluation. Implicit here is the understanding that such evaluation is used to make a school more effective. Self-evaluation can broadly be considered a form of internal assessment undertaken by school staff and overseen by the governing body. In contrast, inspection is the main external evaluation, instigated by Ofsted. The role of the primary headteacher in relation to evaluation will be focused on, including how they approach their school's self-evaluation together with how external evaluation impacts on the role, both in the short term prior to and during an inspection, and the wider implications between and after inspections.

The conceptual framework is represented in Figure 1.1 below:

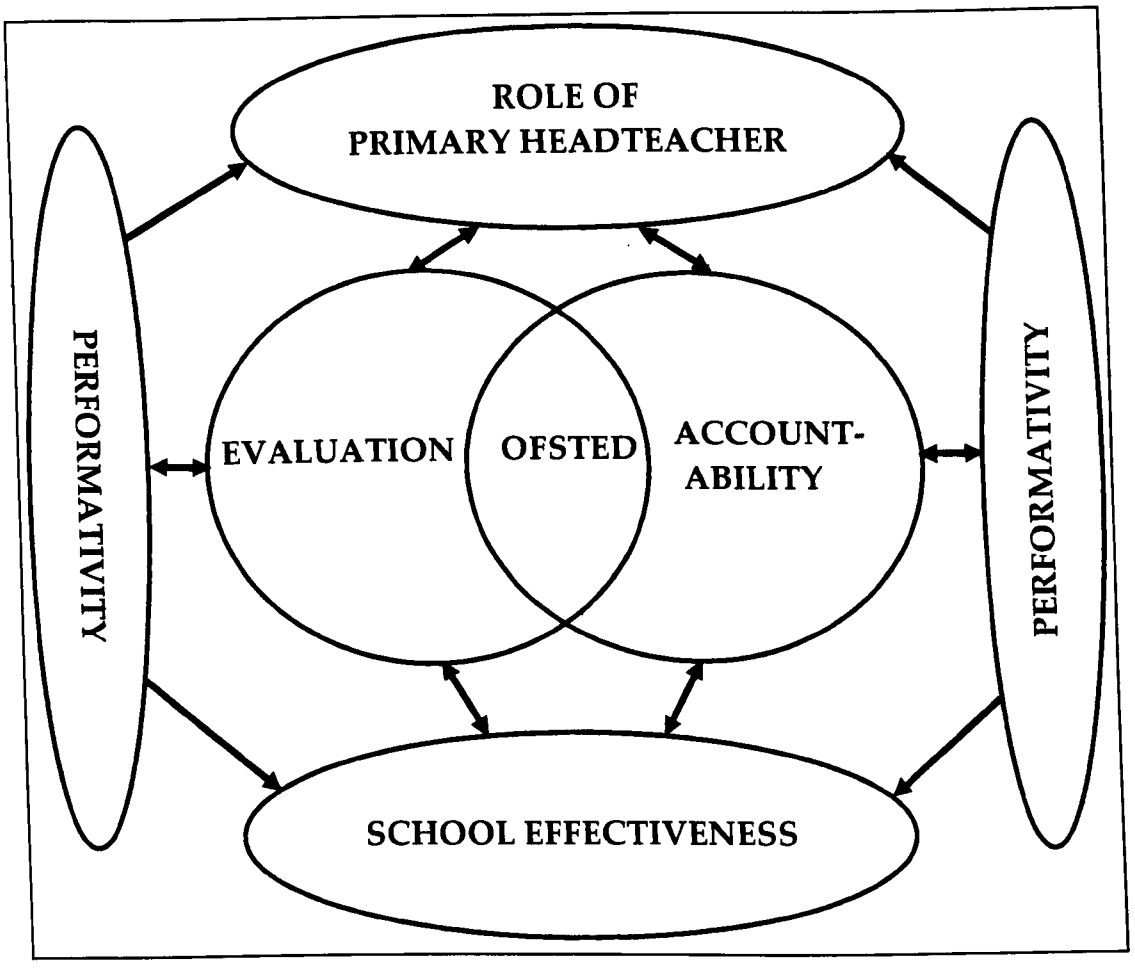

Figure 1.1: The conceptual framework

Figure 1.1 shows the relationship between the concepts identified and illustrates their interdependence. Every primary school is expected to evaluate, with both external inspection and internal self-evaluation being necessary to satisfy the demands of accountability in a performativity culture. Moreover, both forms of evaluation are necessary to demonstrate a school's effectiveness. The diagram further highlights the central role the headteacher plays in the process, with their evaluations feeding into inspection, whilst being

held to account for their school's performance by all interested parties, both internally and externally.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions have been designed to structure the study:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

HOW DO PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE IN THE 2005 OFSTED FRAMEWORK?

This question explores the most important issues for headteachers in the Section 5 inspection framework. It assumes there have been considerable changes to inspection under NRwS, and the intention is to focus upon heads' perceptions of how they see their role. Their levels of autonomy in relation to fulfilling Ofsted's requirements are also investigated.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

HOW DO PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS DESCRIBE THEIR ACCOUNTABILITY TO OFSTED?

It is recognised that leaders of maintained primary schools are likely to be accountable to a number of stakeholders. This question aims to consider headteachers' accountability to Ofsted and to make

comparisons between this and others who may hold the school, or its head, to account. The implications of this accountability, both professionally and personally, are further investigated.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN HEADTEACHERS' INTERPRETATION OF THEIR ROLE AND THE OFSTED EXPERIENCE?

The final question brings together the themes from the other research questions and investigates whether the headteachers' approach to inspection may influence the outcomes achieved.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant academic literature. This includes consideration of the four main concepts identified, namely school effectiveness, role, accountability and evaluation, with the underlying issue of performativity permeating these concepts. A final section brings together the key ideas and discusses the relationship between them, together with the potential implications for my role as a primary headteacher.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the research methodology adopted, starting with a brief evaluation of educational research and a discussion of the benefits of adopting a mixed methods approach. This is followed by a description of the methods of data collection, the two instruments used and the rationale for these. In Chapter 4 the data collected are considered in relation to the conceptual framework. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is combined with the aim of providing a logical approach to identifying the emerging themes.

Chapter 5 details the main themes and uses them to address the three research questions. Particularly relevant are the different approaches and levels of autonomy apparent in the role of the headteacher being balanced with their accountability and other internal and external demands, together with a consideration of how these issues may affect the headteacher and even perhaps influence an inspection.

Chapter 6 is more reflective in content and relates the study to the wider educational environment. The implications of the study for the education profession generally and for future possible research will be considered, alongside some potential questions to pose to the Ofsted inspectorate. The thesis concludes with Chapter 7, this comprises a short personal account, detailing the positive and

negative experiences of my research journey, critically reflecting on the process and its effects on me as a practitioner researcher.

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CHAPTER 2

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LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents literature in relation to the concepts identified in Chapter 1. A definition of school effectiveness is established initially, including how performativity measures are used to identify effectiveness, as this underpins the study. The concept of role is then considered, exploring literature surrounding school leadership with a specific focus on the role of the primary school headteacher, including the levels of autonomy they enjoy and how an individual's personality traits and beliefs may affect the role. Next, literature concerning the accountability implicit within the English school system is examined. A discussion of external and internal evaluations found in the inspection process will follow. School self-evaluation will also be considered, a concept that can range from informal, ongoing assessments to a type of self-inspection in the current climate of accountability.

The interrelationship of the concepts in relation to the inspection process is then discussed, including the implications NRwS may have for the primary headteacher. Finally, the chapter will conclude with my reflections on the literature, and how it corresponds with my experiences as a primary headteacher in the early 21st Century.

SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

Measuring effectiveness

It is argued that being in an effective school will be "a crucial determinant of life chances for many individual young people". (Mortimore and MacBeath, 2001:233) Hence, the more effective a school is then the better experiences it will provide for its pupils. In early 21st Century England, the main measure of school effectiveness is determined by pupils' results in national testing systems, from the Early Learning Goals at the start of formal schooling, through key stage SATs and on to Advanced Level examinations at its conclusion. However, Torrance (2011:477) argues that SATs testing can narrow the primary curriculum so may give an inaccurate picture of a cohort's capabilities, and can even bring into question the validity and reliability of the tests, which form the initial judgements of a school made by Ofsted.

Mortimore states that an effective school is:

> One in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. (Mortimore, 1991:219)

Consequently, pupils must exceed both academic and personal expectations for a school to be deemed effective. MacBeath and Myers (1999:25) extend this understanding to include school staff. They identify a positive environment, high expectations, academic success and a co-operative team as being necessary attributes for an effective school. However, Ouston (2003:254) points out that school effectiveness literature can be naïve as schools are highly complex organisations and many factors will determine a school's success. She goes on to outline the contradiction in much research because small, almost indistinguishable, differences between schools can crucially affect pupils' outcomes. This is corroborated by Mortimore and MacBeath (2001) who argue there is little variation between more and less effective schools. MacBeath highlights the differing perspectives of a school obtained from various stakeholders:

> A 'good' school might only be good when viewed from certain angles. It may look good from the head's office but not necessarily as seen by the youngest pupil. (MacBeath, 1999:15)

All stakeholders will have different perspectives, depending on how they utilize a school and what impact it has on them personally. From this stance, an inspector may arguably take a particularly objective stance, by comparing one school with another, albeit one of the main focuses is likely to be on examination results which may not be the most relevant measure for all stakeholders.

Fisher (2011:52) notes the current performativity culture has led to schools having to demonstrate "narrow interpretations of educational success", illustrated by test and examination results. De Waal (2008:6) points out that other accomplishments like social skills and positive behaviour are also essential but these are more difficult to quantify or evaluate. This perhaps explains Ofsted's focus on assessment data as it is the most straightforward measure of school effectiveness, which can provide direct comparisons to be made between different schools.

A culture of performativity

Performativity is a complex term, which in this study is used to describe the measuring of a school's performance, or of what is considered effective within education. It has been argued by Fisher (2011:53) that a culture of performativity does not guarantee success

but leads to teachers and pupils only being valued according to how well they perform. Troman *et al* (2007:555) agree that many people working in schools feel the pressure of performing for national tests can take away creativity from the curriculum, leading to disaffection for pupils and their teachers, with their wellbeing considered of less importance than examination results. However, it is acknowledged that Ofsted's NRwS places some emphasis on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural elements of school provision, albeit these judgements are perhaps considered somewhat supplementary following scrutiny of assessment data.

A perturbing aspect of school performativity is the pressure on both staff and pupils, caused by the constant threat of having to achieve acceptable standards. Perryman (2009:616) refers to the metaphor of the Panopticon, first identified by Bentham (1787:15), in relation to the prison inspection process. There, prisoners were never sure if they were being watched, so in time learnt to behave as if they were under constant observation. Bentham described it as "the apparent omnipresence of the inspector". Perryman argues this allegory can be likened to a school anticipating an Ofsted inspection, with the staff continually checking their procedures and almost behaving as if they are under constant inspection. She builds on Foucault's (1977)

influential work, within organisations such as prisons, schools and hospitals. He describes the power which pervades such a system:

> The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. (Foucault, 1995:201)

From this perspective, it is the teachers that are the 'inmates', rather than pupils in their schools, with the analogy suggesting school staff are restricted or controlled by the inspection system. Foucault (1995:204) goes on to describe how those inside an organisation will be, to some extent, holding the power. It is in their hands how they choose to accommodate a continual state of visibility, so there is some autonomy regarding how the school 'inmates' choose to approach the inspection process. Headteachers may choose to work towards satisfying Ofsted's expectations or conversely could disregard them. However, it is apparent that a head who takes little notice of inspection must have a great deal of confidence in his or her approach and be prepared to justify it. Changes under NRwS may perceivably intensify the sense of self-inspection even further, due to self-evaluation expectations coupled with short notice leading to a school almost policing itself, which Foucault (1995:195) describes as operating a "seeing machine".

A final concern is that the expectation to meet acceptable norms may encourage schools to give something of a false impression, or put on a performance for inspection. Perryman (2009:617) describes performativity as "performances that measure efficiency". She goes on to describe the possibility of schools putting on an act to satisfy an Ofsted 'audience'. This corresponds with Hall and Noyes' (2009:331) research into school culture. They found the teachers in their study were quite open about "the inauthenticities and the 'fabrications'" of their performance to accommodate the performativity elements of inspection. In addition, Ball (2003) discusses the pretence which can permeate inspection and notes the paradox of such a "façade". By being proactive in deciding how to present a school for inspection, staff are indeed succumbing to the rigorous process. According to Ball:

> Fabrications are both resistance *and* capitulation. They are a betrayal even, a giving up of claims to authenticity and commitment, an investment in plasticity. (Ball, 2003:225)

His view is clearly of concern. Such falseness could not be sustained over a long period and would place school personnel, and particularly the headteacher, under constant pressure to satisfy the demands of an unreal situation. Hence, the endeavour to meet performativity expectations would not lead to an effective school in

the longer term, and may even prove counter-productive, not least in embedding a straightforward, honest rationale into the wider school culture.

A school's culture

Research into school effectiveness is questioned by Ouston (2003:261), who argues that small idiosyncrasies will interplay to form a school's culture and to help shape its ethos, which may have considerable implications for its successes. Thus, a combination of issues, strategies and traditions will combine to make each school distinctive, and what works in one may not in another, albeit some typical features can be identified. Hall and Noyes collected data from eight secondary schools to identify three basic approaches:

(i) Collaborative
(ii) Centralised
(iii) Resisting (Hall and Noyes, 2009:314)

Essentially they found that school personnel in a collaborative culture enjoy the most positive interaction and experiences, with the staff taking a collective approach in preparing for inspection, including the self-evaluation requirements. In contrast, teachers and curriculum leaders in schools with a centralised culture feel more of

an 'us and them' relationship with their senior leaders. They perceive self-evaluation as a form of self-inspection imposed by senior colleagues, rather than all working together to develop their school. In some aspects, schools with a resisting culture experience a more co-operative approach, as all staff members are quite resistant to inspection and only consider that self-evaluation is necessary to comply with Ofsted, so adopt a more half-hearted approach. Self-evaluation is again perceived as self-inspection, but the school team show greater accord in their unified culture.

It is notable that the schools found to have a collaborative culture in Hall and Noyes (2009) research had received quite varied inspection outcomes, indeed one had been assessed as inadequate shortly beforehand. This suggests that working collaboratively is not a precursor for success, but it may create a more positive ethos helping a school to thrive in the longer term. This view is supported by Fullan and Watson (2000:456), who argue that school effectiveness is best achieved by promoting a positive culture. Sun *et al* (2007:96) also stress it is crucial for staff to collaborate, and highlight the importance of a capable headteacher leading the team.

Much other literature also emphasizes the importance for a school to have effective leadership with a strong headteacher. For instance,

Wallace (2002:164) states that successful schools will have a confident headteacher who will empower senior staff by distributing leadership and developing an efficient structure. Harris (2005:161) agrees there is a positive link between effective schools and their leadership. It is thus apparent that all people connected with a school will help define it but this will be steered by the headteacher.

Importance of the leader to an effective school

Dictionary definitions distinguish between management as:

> The process of being in charge of people, money or time. (Oxford, 2006:618)

Whilst leadership is defined as:

> To be in charge of other people, to influence them to do or believe something. (Oxford, 2006:576)

These descriptions suggest leadership has a more 'vision-setting role', but in educational contexts the terms 'leadership and management' are often coupled together, as indeed they are in Ofsted judgements. Recent evaluations for Section 5 inspections state that:

> The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is a

> determining factor in making the judgement about the school's capacity for sustained improvement. (Ofsted, 2010:37)

Here it is evident the headteacher and leadership team are seen as intrinsic to a school's effectiveness. Anderson (2003:11) notes that people are vital in any organisation, other resources can be managed but due to the potential interactions between human beings, and the disparity possible due to differing values and behaviours, they will generate a fundamental need for leadership. This is further augmented in a school context as it is the headteacher's responsibility to not only lead and manage staff, but also the pupils. Ramsey (1999:5) agrees that being a headteacher contrasts markedly with corporate leadership. He argues this is due to uncertainties about consistent funding, no control over the "raw material", essentially the pupils, and because measurable results can often not be realised for many years. In addition, he stresses that headteachers are accountable to many more "bosses" than most commercial leaders and are expected to carry out more managerial tasks. Crawford includes an additional element by describing the emotional demands of school leadership, arguing that:

> A headteacher.....is pivotal emotionally because s/he is the emotional buffer between the school staff and the community of the school more generally. (Crawford, 2009:77)

The headteacher is, therefore, ultimately responsible for ensuring his or her school succeeds in a culture of performativity but this is made more challenging due to a moral duty of care to pupils and their families. This view is supported by Anderson (2003:12) who notes the values and beliefs of those involved in education result in their work being viewed as much more than just a job. Moreover, it illustrates the dilemma a head may face in addressing business-type performativity measures in a very different environment.

Scrutinizing headteacher vacancy advertisements can prove illuminating, with a variety of expectations detailed by prospective employers. Thomson (2009:48-57) carried out a content analysis of the Times Educational Supplement, the newspaper predominantly used to advertise headship vacancies in the United Kingdom. She analysed both the personal characteristics expected of prospective headteachers and details of the role they were required to perform. This analysis indicates some common expectations, including a requirement for previous experience; the ability to bring about change; the capacity to improve standards; a desire for a moral basis to leadership; the capability to liaise effectively with stakeholders; and various personal qualities, including expectation to be creative, innovative, energised, committed or enthusiastic. Importantly, Thomson found schools "valued charisma over collaboration"

(2009:50). She further notes the advertisements tended to present an underlying masculine style of leadership, with a focus on performative processes and logical strategy, albeit some primary schools listed more stereotypically feminine attributes, such as care and friendship. Thomson describes that, in general, schools were extremely optimistic and would be fortunate to find all of these characteristics encapsulated in one human being, which may help to explain the lack of applicants for headteacher posts as some aspiring heads may doubt their own abilities. (See Howson, 2008:1)

There is limited scope here to focus on all of the characteristics identified, however, the aspiration for headteachers to possess charisma will be explored further, as it is an attribute which permeates many of those listed and is highly regarded in some of the advertisements analysed. The charismatic leader is defined by Thomson (2009:58) as having five main characteristics, including a clear vision, positive communication, sensitivity to school context and personnel, a risk-taking attitude and a somewhat unconventional approach. The inclusion of unconventionality is noteworthy, as although heads are expected to comply with recommended practices, for schools and their leadership teams to be judged outstanding by Ofsted they must do more than merely meet expectations, which suggests some nonconformity may be necessary.

There is a note of caution, however, as Thomson (2009:58-59) also describes negative aspects of charismatic leaders, including the possibility of becoming egotistical and, although skilled at generating ideas or initiating change, they may not be the most tenacious leaders at effecting these improvements.

Interviews undertaken by Moore *et al* (2002:178) highlight that their headteacher participants generally manage to maintain their own vision and educational values whilst leading a businesslike market-led organisation on the one hand and delivering a prescribed national curriculum on the other. Although their interviewees described implicit tensions, the researchers found the most successful schools were those where the head had a "particular style of management which had a conscious eclecticism at its core". This suggests these successful headteachers have confidence in their own abilities, whilst being a little unconventional and proactive in leading improvements, which is consistent with Thomson's (2009) description of charismatic leaders.

The ability for a headteacher to form positive relationships is valued by Harris and Day (2003:94), who argue that having a friendly, helpful attitude is more important than following a particular leadership style. It is apparent that such constructive relationships

may enhance the New Relationship with Ofsted as well as a sense of affiliation with other stakeholders. Furthermore, Leithwood and Day (2008:3) note that differences in just a few personality traits can explain much of the disparity between the effectiveness of school leaders. Harris (2004:3) points out the "equation" between school leadership and school effectiveness should be relatively simple, whereas in practice it is very complex. It seems inconceivable that such a relationship can be reduced to a calculation, but to some extent this is what happens in the inspection process. Harris agrees with Ouston (2003) that schools are unique and function in different contexts, but notes the lack of research into exploring what forms of leadership result in an effective school. Consequently, it can be argued that headteachers need to be confident and adaptable, changing their style to suit individual circumstances, which suggests they have some autonomy. However, small differences in how each school is led and managed are perhaps key to the levels of success achieved.

The role of headteacher has been found to be instrumental to the effectiveness of a school (see Bottery, 2007:106, and Lambert, 2005:109), which leads to a brief consideration of role theory, followed by specific focus on the role of the primary headteacher.

ROLE

Role theory

The concept of role has its origins in twentieth century social psychology, with authors such as Biddle explaining that role theory is concerned with:

> One of the most important characteristics of social behaviour – the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation. (Biddle, 1986:68)

The references to 'different' and 'predictable' imply that individuals will make their own choices as to how to execute a given role, but these are likely to fit within acceptable norms. Thus in a school context, although the head can largely behave as they choose on a day-to-day basis, there is an expectation this behaviour is intended to make their school effective. Biddle further argues the concept of role originated from a theatrical metaphor. Indeed, a dictionary defines role as:

> An actor's part in a play, film, etc. or a person's or thing's characteristic or expected function. (Oxford, 1996)

Thus, whilst anyone carrying out a role will have objectives to fulfil, there may be an element of play acting inherent. Faia sheds further light on the analogy:

> Role expectations are subjectively held notions as to how one should play a given role, but actual role playing may diverge sharply from such ideals. Role fulfilment is measured by whatever convergence may exist between role expectations and the actual beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of those active in a given role. (Faia, 1980:37)

From this understanding, it is apparent the playing of a role will have subjective elements and different individuals may fulfil their responsibilities in differing ways. This has implications for the role of headteacher, as there are numerous expectations as to what a head should accomplish. These originate from many stakeholders, including parents, staff, governors and Ofsted. How these expectations are achieved will depend on the importance they are afforded by the headteacher, the elements given priority and their impact on the head's role, which indicates that a level of autonomy is intrinsic.

Crawford (2009:20-22) makes the important point that every kind of social interaction requires people to take on a role. This role performance will transfer to the expectations in any job or profession, so for instance, airline cabin crew must be welcoming and friendly to passengers, or police officers will need to show disapproval in negative situations. Crawford suggests that fulfilling a role will cause tension if the emotions required may conflict with an

individual's own feelings or beliefs. Therefore, in a school context, it is perceivable that a headteacher may experience an imbalance between their values and those of other stakeholders. Indeed, an additional element of headship is to manage this imbalance in order to lead a school effectively.

The role of primary headteacher

Crawford (2009:133) argues the role of primary headteacher is quite distinct from that in other school phases, due to generally leading smaller organisations than secondary school colleagues, so having less staff and fewer in leadership positions. All heads have overall responsibility for their school, but in primaries this means the headteacher often has to make major decisions on their own, with little support or opportunity for delegation. It is apparent, therefore, that primary headship may be quite a lonely position, even though individuals work in busy school environments. Flintham identifies isolation and loneliness to be major characteristics of headship, as is the:

> Lack of sympathy with the burgeoning national or local change agenda.....in particular, there was a concern for.....what was seen as an alien accountability culture, particular in its link to performance management. (Flintham, 2003:6)

This indicates that each primary head will have to work independently to implement performativity measures to satisfy a variety of stakeholders, alongside meeting other demands of the role.

The multi-faceted nature of primary headship was researched by Southworth (1998:51), who describes how heads have to "juggle" a variety of tasks. Recent research, such as that by Plowright (2008) and Fidler *et al* (2009), further investigates the complexities of headship. For instance, in any one day a head could conceivably teach a class themselves, performance manage other teachers, analyse assessment data, alleviate concerns from worried parents and answer queries from the governing body or local authority. However, even when considering the many features of the role, Southworth (1998:51) notes that Ofsted is perceived generally as the foremost concern for primary headteachers. His viewpoint is confirmed more recently by De Waal (2008), whilst Avis (2003:324) describes how performativity in education operates within a "blame culture", with inspection proving particularly demanding. These viewpoints are of great relevance to the study and suggest the implications of a poor inspection are considerable for heads.

Demands of the role

There are numerous demands made of the headteacher, including working long hours and performing a variety of tasks. Gunter *et al* (2004:7) researched the effects of a DfES (2002) project designed to encourage a reduction in working patterns. They found that headteachers' workloads generally exceed those in comparable professions, even taking school holidays into account. However, long hours are not considered as problematic as the "corrosive effects of performative processes", which are cited as the most negative aspect of the role. Bottery (2007:90) highlights the extensive literature on headteacher "burnout" and, perhaps most worryingly, less teachers aspiring to headship. Multiple accountabilities, including the responsibility for ensuring school effectiveness, are likely to further increase the pressures felt.

It was identified by Whitaker (1993:134) that a considerable proportion of the head's working day is taken up with low-level "trivia focused" activities. However, on a more heartening note, he goes on to state that it is vital for a successful organisation to strike a balance between such managerial tasks and effective leadership, arguing that:

> The organisation....will only thrive and grow if the constant flow of daily issues are dealt with and

> attended to. A good organisation is judged by how well it does its job not by the elegance of its policies. (Whitaker, 1993:136)

This suggests that trivial tasks are important to attend to, although a school will also need strategic focus. Blank (1987:70) makes the distinction between a school leader's educative and administrative roles, which may conflict. The primary head is often the one person in a school who evaluates day-to-day activities whilst justifying these within long-term expectations. Thomson (2009:139) further distinguishes between the caring and managerial dimensions of headship, which again could be at variance. This compassionate element of a head's role is perceived from quite a pragmatic angle by Fisher, who suggests that:

> Relationships, instead of being valued in themselves, may be seen as a means of achieving specific ends....teachers and pupils alike are valued according to their contribution to the overall performance. (Fisher, 2011:53)

From this perspective, the purpose of schools as essentially being organisations intended to educate and care for their pupils is put into question. It suggests there will be an inherent tension in headship between satisfying performativity demands whilst meeting the pastoral needs of pupils and staff, which is consistent with Hall and Noyes' (2009) identification of centralised cultures. It is thus

apparent that each headteacher will have to balance their personal beliefs and the nurturing element of their role, whilst still establishing a positive culture and endeavouring to satisfy external expectations. Bradbury and Gunter (2006:502) outline the potential difficulty when these values and beliefs do not correspond.

Many of the problems and possible conflicts that surround headship are discussed by Thomson (2009:2). She goes on to discuss the "risky business" of being a headteacher, asking the ironic question, "whose head is on the block?" This question is of great relevance to the study and suggests the vulnerability that headteachers can face when something goes wrong, or if a school fails to meet performativity expectations. Hart (2004), speaking as the general secretary of the National Association for Headteachers (NAHT), states that headteachers losing their jobs due to poor performance of their school is comparable to football managers when their clubs are on a losing streak. He stresses that most of these job losses are due to Ofsted judgements, saying:

> If the Ofsted inspection is not good, the person who gets fingered is the head. The governors often get away scot-free. (Hart, 2004)

The reference to governors is interesting here, they wield much influence in a voluntary, monitoring capacity but because they can

leave at any time, the implications of inspection for governors are much lower than those for the head. It could be assumed that Hart held a biased view, in that he was addressing NAHT members and possibly intended the speech to either rouse or empathize with his audience. However, it is noteworthy that a similar theme has been repeated regularly since. For instance, Young (2009), an education journalist, and Frankel (2010) discuss 'football manager syndrome' much later.

The high stakes evident in the 'inspection game' are a recurring theme of this study. The analogy is interesting, with Avis' (2003) 'blame culture' inherent in both systems and directed at the team leaders, rather than the soccer players or school teachers. Whilst on some levels it is inconceivable to compare the English education system with something as transitory as a game of football, both influence society markedly and both engender immense emotion within the populace.

Does personality play a part?

The characteristics found in effective school leaders are identified by Leithwood *et al*, who find that:

> The most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient and optimistic. (Leithwood *et al*, 2008:36)

They note these traits are especially evident in those heads in particularly challenging schools, although all effective heads studied share the common characteristics of being positive and confident in their ability to lead and make a difference.

An individual's character and their approach to headship can have a pronounced effect on their success. For instance, Flintham interviewed 15 primary and secondary headteachers who had recently left their posts prior to the expected retirement age and categorises them into three types, which he calls the "Three Ss":

- 'Striders'—who move on in a planned way to a new challenge.
- 'Strollers'—who retreat but in a controlled way.
- 'Stumblers'—who leave headship defeated, perhaps with ill-health retirement.

(Flintham, 2003:3)

These designations are open to some question as Flintham focuses on those leaving headship early and makes no comparison to those who

continued until retirement. Hence, there could arguably be further categories for those showing tenacity or enthusiasm in maintaining the same role. What seems of little doubt is that headteachers are not automatons and will approach leadership differently. Flintham notably found that all of the heads he studied share the same value systems as those who continued in post. This suggests these heads hold the same desire to make their school successful, for the benefit of its pupils and staff, but supports the understanding that different personality traits may profoundly affect an individual's capabilities to remain in the role. Furthermore, the identification of which qualities constitute a successful head may vary depending on who is judging that success and whether it is measured by examination results, happy children and staff, managing change, personal satisfaction, or a combination of these elements. Again, the complexities inherent to the role of primary headteacher and the multiplicity of expectations placed on one person are manifest.

Changes and tensions in primary headship

There have been many changes within primary education over recent years, the main catalysts being the introduction of LMS in the early 1990s, alongside the adoption of a National Curriculum. These reforms essentially meant that headteachers were given more power

and autonomy to lead their schools, but this was offset by the obligation to teach a prescribed curriculum with the expectation that pupils would reach a national standard. The system was somewhat naïve to expect all schools would produce cohorts of pupils where the vast majority would attain national targets. It was perhaps inevitable this would prompt a national inspection system, linked with published test results, to check the curriculum was being satisfactorily delivered and schools were being adequately led. Research (see Thomson, 2009:69, MacBeath, 2006a:53) indicates the apprehension felt by headteachers, because their increased autonomy was quickly diminished by rigorous accountability, with the head openly responsible for the successes or failures of a school. This intrinsic tension between autonomy and accountability recurs throughout the study.

McEwen and Salters (1997:76), researching after LMS was established, describe their concerns that the role of headteacher would change from being a school's lead educational professional to more of a chief executive with greater parallels to the commercial world, due to an increased administrative role. This business-type shift is identified by Grace (1995:20-21), who argues that schools are turning into commodities, or "value-adding production units" with the parents being the consumers of the product. It seems quite ironic

that some 17 years later, school effectiveness is judged by the value added to pupils' academic expectations, with much of a primary headteacher's time spent calculating and reporting such statistics.

Although there were substantial modifications made to school administration under LMS, Weindling (1998:303) argues that little was written initially about the headteacher's changing role. He concedes this was probably assumed as part of wider amendments and did not warrant specific consideration. Such an oversight indicates a failure to recognise that changes to the role of headteacher, particularly meeting national performativity expectations, would increase demands on the individuals involved. These accountabilities and expectations of headship are described by Laar:

> No matter what responsibilities you carried as a deputy, or an assistant head, headship takes you into a whole new world....in the end, everything that happens in this place is down to you....it's not a feeling that ever goes away, either, because the role of headship changes all the time. The wise head knows that years of service aren't necessarily enough when it comes to keeping ahead of the game. (Laar, 2006, Foreword)

Again, the reference to game playing is interesting, suggesting there are rules to be adhered to, winners and losers, and an element of chance in the outcome. Parallels to Hart's (2004) 'football manager

syndrome' are perceptible. Furthermore, the term suggests that a headteacher who confidently embarks on the role as if it were a game, albeit with high stakes, may achieve a better outcome than personalities who feel powerless to win such a demanding contest. A similar metaphor is used by Fidler and Atton (2004:237), who compare leading a school to the game of chess. This analogy implies a more analytical approach to the headship game than football perhaps does, with "sequencing of moves and their consequences", although there are still clearly winners and losers, and effective strategy will gain the best outcome.

The recognition that headteachers can make choices within the role leads to consideration of their autonomy.

Autonomy in headship

The word, autonomy, originates from the Greek *autonomos*, meaning 'having its own laws', and a dictionary defines it as:

> Acting independently or having the freedom to do so. (Oxford, 1996)

For this study, being an autonomous headteacher is understood as having freedom to make some decisions alongside a choice of approach in performing the role.

Research indicates that headteachers of maintained schools have limited control over new initiatives introduced by central government or local authorities, although there is sometimes autonomy as to the degree of implementation taken. This will be dependent on each task or project, whether it is mandatory or if there is choice in its uptake. Moore *et al* (2002:186) describe this approach as "strategic pragmatism", whereby a headteacher considers change from both practical and philosophical viewpoints, with each issue being carefully considered with regard to his or her vision.

Bottery (2007:96) found, during his interviews with twelve headteachers, that none actually question the existence of external authorities, such as Ofsted, which is perhaps due to the inspection body being well established in the education system. However, he notes that those who cope best take a pragmatic approach, rather than trying to criticize or ignore national directives. He quotes one head who again makes reference to playing a game with authority, but said, "if you have to play it, you know you've got to play it to your advantage". This supports the view of Whitaker (1993:61), who outlines the work of Miles and Snow (1978) and transfers it to an educational context. They categorised different approaches made by organisations and their leaders to external pressures. This included identification of three distinct types of behaviour:

- The 'Defender' - typified by those who strive for stability and resist change or challenge

- The 'Analyser' - who accepts new possibilities but only if there is no alternative, which again implies a quite passive approach

- The 'Prospector' - characterised by those who respond well to uncertainty and challenge with the belief it will ultimately bring about improvement.

These typologies can be compared with Flintham's (2003:3) Three Ss, with his 'Striders' corresponding with Whitaker's 'Prospectors'. It is notable the behaviours identified are closely linked to headteachers' personality traits, suggesting their actions will be influenced to some extent by their innate character, alongside any training received.

A headteacher can choose how to operate, be it by default or design, which shows there is opportunity for autonomy in the role. However, the implications of dealing with accountability expectations offer less choice for the headteacher.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability in the education system

A dictionary defines accountability as:

> To be responsible for one's actions and expected to explain them. (Oxford, 2006)

This describes succinctly the current system of accountability in maintained schools. Barzano articulates the particular demands of accountability in a school setting as:

> The sense of a set of formal and informal mechanisms making schools answerable to different constituencies interested in educational results, represents one of the major challenges schools - and headteachers in particular - are dealing with. (Barzano, 2009:190)

The headteacher is ultimately responsible for the effectiveness of his or her school and the success of its pupils. This responsibility is clearly defined and heads must be able to explain their actions to those who hold them to account. Barzano (2009:191) describes how education accountability in its present form dates back to the 1960s, due to the expectation to provide "value for money" with public spending. The connotation of value is notable, with both academic and monetary value intrinsic to satisfying a performativity culture.

It is interesting to note Barzano's reference to both formal and informal systems. The former includes being held formally to account by the governing body, the local authority and ultimately the government, through the inspectorate. Whereas, with the latter unofficial type of accountability, schools and their headteachers are informally answerable to parents, staff, the community and, of course, the pupils in their charge. Barzano (2009:202) notes the

headteachers she interviewed feel neither the governing body nor the local authority are really considered "strong sources of accountability" in comparison to Ofsted, which suggests a hierarchy of power. Her findings support the pertinence of this study's focus. Kogan's (1986) research is of particular significance, he outlines the need for increased accountability within the education system, by stating:

> Whilst education is financed and sponsored as a public activity, it is offered in institutions which are largely closed to public scrutiny and difficult to supervise from the outside....teachers have enormous power to affect the future of young people. (Kogan, 1986:17)

From this perspective, it is understandable the scene was being set for a formalized system of public accountability, making schools answerable for their actions to satisfy the performativity culture. Kogan (1986:11) outlines that education has a long history of relative freedom in comparison to other state-funded sectors, although there is an undertone of support for educationalists when he describes that:

> Bringing the professionals to heel has been a submerged motive in Britain. (Kogan, 1986:20)

This implies some sympathy for headteachers due to increased accountability, which Kogan predicted accurately would provide the

structure for education in subsequent decades. Furthermore, it highlights that the government was not happy for schools to have too much independence alongside limited liability, so instigated a consistent, standardized approach across England, to satisfy performativity demands.

Models of accountability

Kogan identifies three strands to his model of accountability, these are:

1. Public or state control, which entails the use of authority by elected representatives, appointed officials, and the heads and others who manage schools;

2. Professional control, that is, control of education by teachers and professional administrators. With this is associated self-reporting evaluation;

3. Consumerist control, or influence which might take the form of (a) participatory democracy or partnership in the public sector; or (b) market mechanisms in the private or partly privatised public sector. (Kogan, 1986:24)

It is notable that accountability by the headteacher is associated with those externally, which implies Kogan was setting heads apart from other school staff, albeit his research was prior to the changes brought under LMS. Furthermore, the second strand shows self-

evaluation being undertaken by teachers as opposed to the head. This indicates the definition and implications of self-evaluation have changed over subsequent decades.

There are various other models of accountability which help to define the more recent situation in schools. For instance, Reder outlines four types which predominate in contemporary education, these are:

1. Performance accountability (for outcomes achieved by learners);

2. Bureaucratic accountability (compliance with rules and regulations especially around funding and quality assurance procedures);

3. Professional accountability (compliance with recognised professional practices, enforced by quality inspections);

4. Market accountability (in terms of consumer choice of enrolment). Reder (2005:2)

These typologies have close links with Kogan's earlier model, although the head is not separated from school colleagues. Reder notes the performance model has become the most popular in education and other public sector organisations. This is probably due to the government's focus on performativity, by setting targets and measuring the outcomes of these.

Accountability in a primary school

The use of examination results to hold a school to account has received much criticism, as a school's attainment is used to judge its effectiveness. Barzano (2009:201) researched headteachers' opinions and found they generally believe there should be comparisons made between schools, but they question the value of testing due to the potential of setting inappropriate tasks or relying on inaccurate data. Her view is supported by Torrance (2011:477), he argues that SATs testing may cause teachers to 'teach to the test', so narrowing the curriculum which could then give an inaccurate picture of pupils' attainment, and even possibly affect the validity and reliability of the tests which are relied upon. Jones (2010:73) also describes the "serious negative implications" of extensive testing, by reducing creativity and increasing the stress levels of pupils and teachers. Anderson's (2005:18) study corroborates Torrance's work, she argues that results-based accountability is unreliable when it leads to a single level of analysis, and moreover, if this analysis is not properly understood by all parties. This would include the publishing of league tables which can engender much anxiety in a local community due to focusing on results and disregarding contextual factors or specific cohort issues.

Moral accountability adds another important element, which can be described as the ethical dimension of headship. Earley and Weindling include this moral aspect in their model, which describes forms of accountability present in schools:

- to pupils (moral accountability)
- to colleagues (professional accountability)
- to employees or political masters (contractual accountability)
- to the market – where clients have a choice of school (market accountability)

(Earley and Weindling, 2004:78)

Although moral accountability is an admirable quality, with important connotations for children and staff, it is more difficult to measure than test results or to compare across different schools. It is apparent, therefore, that it would take a determined and highly principled head to totally disregard examination results. Indeed, a balance between the different accountabilities is ideal, as an incredibly caring school with very poor academic standards would not survive under current expectations. There is a more heartening perspective from Pinter *et al* (2007:262), who found those leaders with high moral accountability were actually more competitive and successful, too, even though they showed greater concern about their

own capabilities. This suggests that adopting a moral approach will not diminish a headteacher's effectiveness, and may even enhance it, albeit with the potential of some personal anxiety. Barzano (2009:203) also found evidence of strong moral accountability from heads, towards their pupils, in her interview data. Notably, these heads felt this often had to be curtailed due to the implications of their wider accountability framework. It can thus be perceived that headteachers may experience some conflict in fulfilling the requirements of formal accountability, when they would prefer to be concentrating their efforts on pupils' wellbeing.

The literature indicates that test data should ideally be used in conjunction with other measures of school effectiveness. However, the problem appears to be finding other appropriate, relatively inexpensive and quantifiable methods which enable the state to make accurate comparisons across different school settings. Whilst such emphasis is placed on examination results, it is difficult to see how the inspection process can change without more trust being afforded to heads and teachers. Macpherson (1995:477) stresses that for school accountability to be productive, it needs to be "flexible and based on mutual respect". From this perspective, it can be argued that the bureaucratic accountability of the Ofsted system is perhaps of far more use to officialdom than to schools themselves.

It is perhaps naïve to assume that all schools will flourish over time without appraisal and development, although it is fundamental to identify who is responsible for ensuring these developments happen - will it come from within, or will it need external impetus? A consideration of evaluation, its purposes and relationship to accountability will follow.

EVALUATION

Evaluating a primary school

Evaluation can be described as finding out to what extent something works or is effective. A dictionary definition is:

> To form an idea of the value of something. (Oxford, 2006)

This definition is clarified by looking at the meaning of value:

> The importance or worth of something. (Oxford, 2006)

Evaluation is thus a process to establish value, or indeed the extent to which something is valuable and the impact of that value. It is necessary to place the term in an educational context, to consider the implications for schools.

Generally, there are two basic types of evaluation in school – external and internal. Alvik (1997) describes the forms that such evaluation may take and discusses parallel, sequential or co-operative approaches. With parallel evaluations, both the school and any external body conduct their own checks, whilst in a sequential system, a school's own evaluations are used to inform an external body. A co-operative approach includes internal and external evaluators working together and coming to a negotiated consensus. There is an element of this co-operation in shared lesson observations, between inspectors and heads during inspection; however, NRwS has mainly taken a sequential approach, with internal self-evaluation feeding into external judgements. There is potential for some disparity as the evaluators have contrasting standpoints and may use different types of measure. Thomson (2009:74) describes this conflict as that between an intrinsic need to develop a school, and an extrinsic requirement to fulfil expected performance outcomes. This aptly sums up the dilemma between internal and external evaluations, highlighting their interrelationship.

External evaluation of a school is concerned principally with ensuring acceptable standards are reached and that the school has provided its pupils with an, at least, adequate education. Internal

evaluation is far more likely to be concerned with identifying what has been achieved and planning future developments. Dark (2003:143) describes external audits as the "antithesis" of internal evaluations, which again suggests there is some conflict between them. A more detailed consideration of external evaluation, followed by a focus on internal assessment through school self-evaluation will follow.

External evaluation: school inspection

In this study, external evaluation focuses on school inspection, although it is acknowledged there are other forms of external evaluation in a primary school, such as that carried out by a local authority. In addition, the standards pupils reach are measured externally by statutory assessments. Although these evaluations are distinct from inspection, their findings will feed into the inspection process and help determine Ofsted's judgements, so the particular significance of inspection to a school's success is apparent.

A dictionary definition of the word 'inspection' states it is:

> To examine closely, especially for faults or errors.....to scrutinize officially. (Collins, 1992)

Cullingford (1999:1) argues that although school inspection is a relatively new phenomenon, the concepts it addresses such as power and accountability are actually quite ancient. However, since the instigation of Ofsted in the early 1990s inspection has become increasingly contentious and often newsworthy. MacBeath describes the teaching profession considered the first years of Ofsted to be:

> A punitive, expensive and time-consuming system of 'policing' schools, resulting in the 'naming and shaming' culture. (MacBeath, 2006a:42)

Consequently, inspection may be perceived as negative and potentially threatening by school staff. However, due to the school system being funded by public monies to provide education for the nation's children, it is perhaps not surprising that in the target-driven performativity culture of the early 21st Century, scrutiny of the practices and outcomes of English schools is considered fundamental. Indeed, Leithwood and Day argue that the Ofsted system places:

> The most demanding accountability pressures on schools to be found anywhere in the world at this time. (Leithwood and Day, 2008:2)

Ofsted's original intention was to inspect, for approximately one week's duration, each maintained school at least once during each four-year cycle, although this proved unwieldy. The system for

school inspection was changed following the election of a Labour Government in 1997, the main difference being that visits extended to every six years. Previously, inspections had been subject to very long notice periods, up to a year in some cases, which understandably caused much trepidation for school staff. Nevertheless, MacBeath (2006a) states that one of the main impetuses for the change was to cut costs for what had proved to be a very expensive process. Ouston *et al* (1997:103) confirm that inspection was becoming prohibitively expensive. For example, Cullingford (1999:23) states that in the late 1990s, the cost of an inspection for a median-sized primary school was over £26,000. The figure included inspector time and administration, as well as additional financial costs to the school to prepare for the visit and effect recommendations. This implies changes to inspection under NRwS were not necessarily designed for the benefit of schools or to ensure their effectiveness, but were a cost-cutting measure. Cullingford (1999:110) also outlines an additional, and perhaps more concerning, human cost, in stress for the personnel involved. There is a wealth of literature available which highlights the considerable strain that an Ofsted inspection may place on the teachers involved. For instance, Chapman (2001:60) describes the pressures placed on teachers and school leaders in both the build-up to inspections and during the visit itself. (See also Crawford, 2009, and Laar, 2006.)

From the instigation of Ofsted until NRwS in 2005, the main purpose of inspection was to check on teaching and learning. Indeed, Case *et al* (2000:609) describe how inspectors focused on classroom processes rather than the organisation of a school at this time. Since the 2005 framework there has been greater emphasis on inspectors working with the head and senior leadership team and scrutinizing their monitoring and evaluation documentation, rather than focusing on classroom activities. MacBeath (2006a:75) describes that teachers often feel on the "periphery" of an inspection, and believe their "collective expertise" to be overlooked. It is understandable this may have led to some teachers feeling side-lined, or even inferior to school leaders, albeit others were possibly relieved to receive less scrutiny. MacBeath's observation further suggests that additional strain on the head to be another likely consequence of NRwS.

Chapman's (2001:63/64) case study of five schools found that approximately 70 per cent of teachers agree or strongly agree that the main aim of Ofsted is to make schools accountable for their actions, whereas only 12 per cent disagree with this statement. The views of the other 18 per cent are not stated in the research, which weakens the evidence somewhat. In the same study, 58 per cent of teachers believe inspection is a useful tool for school improvement, whereas only 20 per cent do not. Again, the views of the remainder of

respondents are not recorded. Chapman concludes his study by debating whether an Ofsted inspection and subsequent report actually contribute to the improvement of a school, which suggests it is mainly concerned with evaluating effectiveness at a point in time, rather than instigating change. This view is supported by Plowright (2007:380), who in his detailed case study of one school and its personnel, relates their experiences to wider findings. He argues the case study approach is interpretivist and uses the experiences of those involved to help explain the theory. Ironically, it can be argued this same interpretivist methodology is actually adopted by Ofsted themselves when they carry out a school inspection. They scrutinise one setting and have to reach criterion-based judgements to make their evaluations and compare these to wider expectations.

Linking inspection with school improvement and effectiveness

Inspection is used to judge school effectiveness, although researchers such as Perryman (2009) question whether the process actually helps to improve schools. Cullingford (1999:211) argues the introduction of Ofsted was a symptom of a wider cultural shift towards a reliance on assessment and control in education. He asks the fundamental question:

> Which is of more importance; the measurement, with the impact on outcomes, or the outcomes themselves? (Cullingford, 1999:212)

This is crucial to the debate concerning school effectiveness and the reasons for inspection. Will measuring how effective a school is make any difference to how it performs in reality? It is further apparent that unless schools and their inspectors know which features make up an effective school, then it is very difficult to aspire to these.

Plowright (2007:375) describes the experience of inspection reported by many schools as poor. He argues this is partly due to headteachers believing the focus to be on accountability rather than school development. He notes that a number of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) annual reports (see Ofsted, 2004, 2005a) state that inspections contribute to raising standards and school improvement. However, Plowright suggests this link is too simplistic, as many schools in challenging circumstances report that inspection only has a marginal effect on improving practice. The pertinent question to ask is who is inspection for? Does it help develop schools or is it merely an official appraisal to see if schools are improving themselves? MacBeath (2008:385) argues the Ofsted system originated mainly from an accountability imperative, rather than to

instigate improvements. Furthermore, Matthews and Sammons, in their study of the impact of Ofsted's work, conclude that:

> Improvement through inspection should not be misinterpreted as a claim of direct improvement by inspection. (Matthews and Sammons, 2004:18)

This standpoint suggests there is little short-term advantage for schools being subject to an Ofsted visit, yet in the longer term the processes put in place to address identified weaknesses could prove beneficial. Other research suggests that improvements following inspection may be superficial or difficult to sustain, which implies the inspection itself will not develop schools. Indeed, Matthews and Smith (1995:5) argue that the actual preparation for an inspection may be of most benefit. This fits with Perryman's (2009) Panopticon metaphor, with a state of preparedness being the attitude which actually makes the difference. It is thus apparent that schools do need some type of checking up procedure as their effectiveness may decline with no intervention, although it is questionable whether an Ofsted inspection is the best method for such external evaluation. Nevertheless, a consistent, nationwide approach is perhaps perceived by those in authority as the best system to satisfy a performativity culture.

Plowright (2007:375) goes on to suggest that recent studies have highlighted an intrinsic tension within the inspection process, due to having the dual objectives of both accountability and school development. Notably, Earley, writing more than a decade previously, also asks:

> Can the twin aims of inspection for public accountability and school development sit comfortably side by side? (Earley, 1996:11)

From this perspective, it appears there is no distinct relationship between school inspection and improvement, however, Ehren and Visscher (2008:207) argue that some British research has found a link, although this has not been consistent. Ofsted's own viewpoint is summed up in a recent HMCI annual report:

> Inspection should drive improvement and Ofsted must be an agent for change, not just of scrutiny and challenge. (Ofsted, 2009a:11)

This stance implies the principle aim of inspection is to facilitate school improvement, rather than just provide a snapshot of a school's efficiency, albeit this official perspective contrasts with much literature reviewed. Ouston *et al* (1997:101) report that inspection is more likely to lead to school improvement if a school has received a weak judgement. This finding is perhaps not surprising in that schools deemed to be failing receive far more support and closer

monitoring within the Ofsted process and by their local authority. If progress is not evident over a fairly short period, then steps are taken to replace the headteacher or even close a school, so it is clearly in their interests to demonstrate improvement. Sammons (2008:655) describes this as a "high challenge high support" model of performance management, which suggests the processes put in place by Ofsted to deal with schools causing concern will help them succeed. The HMCI Annual Report for 2008/09 confirms this, as it states:

> Of the 167 schools placed in special measures in 2005/06, 19 had closed while in special measures by 31 August 2009. Of those remaining, 96% were judged at least satisfactory at their most recent inspections, and 26% were good or outstanding. (Ofsted, 2009a:24)

This statistic, which includes maintained schools of all phases, indicates that inspection will lead to school improvement, although it also highlights the considerable implications for schools that do not improve, as over 11 per cent had closed. It is important to appreciate the government's basic rationale is to ensure all children are educated, so they want schools to stay open and thrive. However, some research (for example, McCrone *et al*, 2007:86) suggests that one of the expected outcomes post-inspection has been a dip in standards, as staff have either felt quite disillusioned or are perhaps

worn out by the process. Furthermore, school staff may relax as they know they will not have to expect another inspection for a considerable period of time. Any one of these issues could clearly lead to the direct opposite of improvement, although a more positive outcome is that the whole experience, good or bad, may help build a strong team ethos, similar to Hall and Noyes' (2009:314) identification of a collaborative culture, which should benefit a school. It is further apparent that under NRwS there is no follow-up visit made by the same inspectors, so any subsequent inspection can never be absolutely comparable. Ehren and Visscher argue that:

> Inspecting schools without follow-up and monitoring activities is probably not very effective. (Ehren and Visscher, 2008:225)

This acknowledgment could have considerable benefits for the inspection process, as changing to a system with integral follow-up procedures would not only bring some continuity between the personalities involved, but may introduce a greater element of development.

Criticisms of inspection

The literature suggests that school inspection has long been subject to criticism by education professionals. For example, Jeffrey and

Woods (1996:325) researched the effects of inspection on primary teachers and their work in five different schools. They describe the "high degree of trauma" often experienced by teachers in the build-up to a visit from Ofsted, and go on to detail the confusion, anxiety and doubt that personnel are subjected to. Case *et al* (2000:612) help explain the underlying stress, by detailing how many school staff perceive an inspection to be a personal judgement on the teachers rather than providing a general overview of their school. This again highlights the moral accountability of school personnel. However, it is important to note this research was carried out during the early years of Ofsted, and the process has had several revisions since then. Another likely source of stress is the public disclosure of inspection findings, Barzano (2009:201) found in her research that many primary heads felt distressed at having their professional competence disclosed to audiences who, in their opinion, did not have the expertise or full information to enable them to judge fairly. This public 'naming and shaming' corresponds with Avis's (2003:324) recognition of performativity in education operating within a 'blame culture'. It is usual for Ofsted outcomes to be reported in local newspapers, which will inform parents to make choices for their children's schooling. Hence, the link between inspection and market accountability is implicit.

A further concern prior to NRwS was that school staff could give something of a falsely positive impression of teaching and processes for the duration of the inspection, as they were so well prepared. Case *et al* (2000:616) studied the impact of longer-notice inspections and suggest that teachers in the past were almost obligated to contrive their teaching, planning and class displays for the inspection. They go on to assert that the whole Ofsted practice itself was at worst a "grand political cipher" which had been devised to satisfy the demands of the government and society. In essence, they argue that Ofsted was a type of "stage-managed public accountability". Case *et* al's study implies that inspections made without prior notice would be likely to receive a more realistic view of a school, which NRwS moves towards. Hargreaves (1995:120) also describes how many heads and teachers become apprehensive of an impending inspection and put up something of a front to avoid the possibility of a harsh judgement. He argues that "only the naïve do nothing in the run-up to the inspection and adopt a take-us-as-you-find-us approach". This recognition supports Hall and Noyes (2009:331) and Perryman (2009:611), who suggest that some teachers may give a false impression of their school, so "this fabrication led to inspection of the performance". Perryman's interpretation indicates that education professionals are not only concerned with the outcome of their inspection but are prepared to give a positive spin

to their school and its activities during the visit, such are the pressures to satisfy performativity. Importantly, this mistrust could bring the whole purpose of inspection into question, as Ofsted would not be inspecting a real situation. However, Hargreaves goes on to emphasize the situation is not all one-sided and that inspectors also assume that:

> There is an element of front to be penetrated.....the game is understood by all parties. (Hargreaves, 1995:120)

This quotation suggests that, although inspections strive to be as objective as possible, school teams will probably do their utmost to be seen in their best possible state but inspectors will be aware of this. It is interesting to again note here the reference to inspection being a game, which implies there are a variety of players working towards an agreed target, with predefined rules intrinsic to the competition. The analogy effectively portrays the inspection process from both internal and external perspectives.

Lonsdale and Parsons (1998:114) conducted their research prior to NRwS, but are particularly critical of inspection and its purpose, stating that inspections disempower and subordinate education professionals. They argue that if school improvement was the primary aim of inspection then staff would not become disenchanted

by receiving a seemingly officious grading. The high stakes evident if schools do not meet performativity measures are thus at odds with the support and development of individual schools, which implies that teachers may question the legitimacy of inspection. Notably, a House of Commons Select Committee Report into Education and Employment highlights the lack of confidence that many teaching professionals have in the inspection process:

> Inspection by Ofsted can all too easily be perceived by the teacher as an inspection of the quality of the teacher him/herself, rather than of the snapshot of lessons observed that week. (House of Commons, 1999, para.11)

From this standpoint, it is conceivable that some education professionals feel their skills and commitment have not been valued, perhaps due to circumstances outside their control. This suggests the changes introduced with NRwS were instigated partly to alleviate such concerns, but also implies the underlying threat due to the implications of a poor inspection report.

Internal evaluation: school self-evaluation

A definition of school self-evaluation, provided by the National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, states that:

> School self-evaluation is a significant indicator of a school's culture and performance.....the prime aim of school self-evaluation is to provide a sound analytical base from which conclusions can be drawn.....school self-evaluation has the effect of informing and supporting the Ofsted process in helping a school to 'know where it is at'. (NAEIAC, 2005:6)

This indicates that self-evaluation is intended to help improve schools, although underlying is an assumption of the external pressure from Ofsted, not least because the description is written from an official perspective. Mortimore and MacBeath (2001:19) found the introduction of a formalized system of self-evaluation to be consistently popular with school staff, albeit other aspects of inspection continued to have a negative image. This suggests that headteachers felt more empowered by the initiative because they were allowed greater input into inspection, which helped pave the way for NRwS. However, MacBeath makes the important point that:

> It is an unhealthy system which relies on the constant routine attentions of an external body to police its schools. (MacBeath, 1999:1)

His stance recognises the importance of self-evaluation alongside inspection, although he further stresses that "quality assurance" necessary in schools should be a shared activity, neither a form of "prevention from the inside", nor a "cure from the outside". (MacBeath, 1999:154) So, self-evaluation should become an integral

part of the evaluation of school practices. Intrinsic links between self-evaluation and school improvement are further described by MacBeath *et al* (2000:94-5), who use the metaphor of travelling through a maze of interconnecting doors to help explain the process. They argue that making systematic connections between what is deemed important in a school and prioritising perceived needs, whilst building on what is already in place, should lead to the greatest effectiveness.

The NRwS framework for the inspection of schools in England emphasizes that inspections have a:

> Strong emphasis on school improvement through the use of the school's own self-evaluation, including regular input from pupils, parents and other stakeholders, as the starting point for inspection and for the school's internal planning and development. (Ofsted, 2005b:1)

It is noteworthy the framework from a couple of years previously (Ofsted, 2003:10) stated that "self-evaluation makes an important contribution to inspections". This indicates the practice had been augmented by Ofsted in the interim. Plowright (2007:390) argues that as time progresses, future frameworks may expect an even greater shift of emphasis, "that it will be *inspection* that will make an important contribution to *school self-evaluation*?" This suggests that over time the influence of Ofsted may diminish as schools become

increasingly proactive and in greater control of their own destiny, and furthermore, that heads may be afforded more trust to instigate improvements in their schools.

Davies *et al* quote a serving headteacher, Peter Smith, who stresses how school self-evaluation has become increasingly important, indeed central, to the leadership and management of schools. Smith points out the benefits of this development:

> It returns a degree of control to us as professional educators, something which only a few years ago seemed to be lost for ever. It provides the opportunity to prove our expertise and our worth. Ultimately, it could enable schools to set their own agenda for improvement, an agenda that dismisses schools as a standardised factory for information cramming but moves them towards being centres of learning and a reflection of the finest achievements of human endeavour. (Peter Smith, quoted in Davies et al, 2005:139)

It is helpful to find a direct quotation from a serving head, somebody involved in contemporary education rather than researching it from the outside. However, this viewpoint could arguably give an idealised version of the inspection experience, and it would be useful to have more detail of the individual headteacher, not least his length of service and own style of leadership, and whether his opinions are representative of the profession as a whole. It is evident this headteacher views self-evaluation as encouraging professionalism

whilst moving away from a reliance on performativity processes, although it could be perceived that performance in more qualitative, values-based pupil achievement then becomes just another measure of school effectiveness.

MacBeath and Myers explain the background to the growing influence of self-evaluation within government philosophy:

> There is an emerging consensus and body of wisdom about what a healthy system of school evaluation looks like. Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection....in such a system there is an important role for an Inspectorate....it is to make itself as redundant as possible.....this role....is strengthened rather than diminished by strong internal evaluation. (MacBeath and Myers, 1999:125-6)

This account helps clarify the changing role of Ofsted and acknowledges the importance of self-evaluation in the move to a more selective and 'lighter touch' approach to inspection. However, the evidence also recognises that competent self-evaluation has made aspects of the previous inspection system somewhat outmoded, which implies that schools are, in fact, carrying out a considerable part of their own inspection. The cost-cutting element to NRwS, as identified by MacBeath (2006a) is also pertinent, although a more positive viewpoint would suggest that school personnel are becoming increasingly trusted to evaluate their own practices.

Ofsted's own guidance entitled 'Best Practice in Self-Evaluation', reports on the organisation's perception of effective self-evaluation, by identifying common features of successful schools. It states that:

> Where headteachers gave priority to and led self-evaluation personally.....self-evaluation was integral to the culture of the organisations.....self-evaluation was a continuous process, governed by the needs of the institution rather than the requirements of external bodies.....external inspection supported but did not replace internal review.....rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses....led to the clear identification of priorities and strategies for improvement. (Ofsted, 2006:2)

It is clear that Ofsted itself recognises school self-evaluation to be a suitable method to gather evidence to support school effectiveness, and also that the processes developed are intended to reflect the quality of leadership in a school. However, it is notable that because Ofsted is identifying its own expectations of self-evaluation, and indeed beginning to reach preliminary judgements on the strength of a school's SEF, it can be argued that internal evaluation does indeed form part of the external review.

Is self-evaluation actually self-inspection?

The summative and formative dimensions of self-evaluation are discussed by MacBeath (2006a:57), who describes how much of the

development of self-evaluation in England and Wales came from an "Ofsted logic". From this perspective it is apparent that external and internal evaluations become quite blurred. Notably, Bubb *et al,* (2007:35) track self-evaluation in 38 schools and highlight possible tensions by considering whether schools are self-evaluating or actually self-inspecting in the current education climate. It is thus questionable whether the main purpose of school self-evaluation is to help develop a school or to help hold it to account. MacBeath (2006a:57) stresses the importance of distinguishing between self-inspection and self-evaluation, with the former being a "top-down", sporadic event with pre-determined criteria, whereas self-evaluation is more of "bottom-up" practice, embedded in the culture of a school and engaging all of its staff. He argues that self-inspection is focused on accountability rather than improvement, whereas self-evaluation in contrast, is concerned with making improvements rather than satisfying accountabilities.

Saunders (1999:421) asks the pertinent question, "who or what is the *'self'* in school self-evaluation?" This implies that schools need to be treated as equal partners with Ofsted for self-evaluation to be a truly worthwhile, internal activity undertaken for the improvement of a school. Saunders (1999:425) further suggests that "externally driven" school self-evaluation runs the risk of producing only

cosmetic improvements, which supports MacBeath's (1999) viewpoint. It is thus difficult to establish who and what school self-evaluation is actually for - is it to improve a school? Is it to satisfy an external body? Would it happen without Ofsted? Although Saunders was researching a number of years before NRwS, the questions surrounding the real purposes of self-evaluation remain relevant. MacBeath *et al* (2000) argue that there will always be an underlying political influence to such questions, which are intrinsically linked to the power behind a school's internal and external relationships:

> There is always the question of 'who decides?'
> For example:
> - Who (what) defines the quality criteria?
> - Who owns the data?
> - What will the consequences be?
>
> (MacBeath *et al*, 2000:95)

Such questions are fundamental to the study, and will influence the relationship that headteachers have with those who hold them to account. Ideally, the aim of all intervention should be to support or improve a school. The issue of trust is thus pertinent, as although the current high levels of accountability recognise a school's evaluations, these are not trusted absolutely, otherwise there would be no need for inspection.

The subjectivity in self-evaluation

A further concern regarding the merits of self-evaluation is provided by Plowright and Godfrey, who question:

> Whether or not headteachers will feel comfortable and confident enough to provide an honest response to undertaking ongoing, formative self-evaluation that will be used as the basis of an external, summative inspection. (Plowright and Godfrey, 2008:38)

The head's role in self-evaluation is acknowledged here, although there is doubt expressed as to whether internal evaluations will be sufficiently objective. This has implications for the potential worth of a school's self-evaluation and whether it will be considered accurate, if not there is clearly little point to the practice, other than to highlight a headteacher's deficiencies. This concern is voiced by Alvik (1997), who argues there can be a tendency in self-evaluation to focus on what one wants to see rather than what is perhaps evident to external, objective assessors. He suggests, therefore, that some form of external evaluation is also necessary to spot the 'blindspots' which may occur within internal assessments. This implies the headteacher may make an inaccurate or falsely positive appraisal of their school to show it in the best possible way, or add that "element of front" identified by Hargreaves (1995). However, MacBeath (1999:73) provides a useful perspective by arguing the

dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity in self-evaluation is merely a "misleading distraction". He uses the analogy of temperature to clarify this, by comparing the numerical reading on a thermometer with the feeling of warmth or wind chill which can be felt, albeit it is still at the same 'objective' temperature. This perception helps explain the equal, but differing, importance of subjective experience alongside objective observation, and illustrates how such subjectivity should not be dismissed as it can provide equally valid evaluations.

Self-evaluating for Ofsted

A formalised system of school self-evaluation was initially introduced in the 1990s, although its contribution to inspection was quite limited at that time, and it was not afforded much significance by either inspectors or schools themselves. Dark (2003:143) notes that Ofsted changed its procedures in 2000, which enabled schools to help confirm or contest inspection hypotheses by using their own monitoring and evaluation. It is no coincidence that self-evaluation began to be advocated at a similar time to schools being given more independence through LMS. Dean, writing in the early stages of Ofsted, questions the relevance of self-evaluation activities,

particularly asking whether the processes actually contribute to school effectiveness or:

> Were they simply a matter of learning how to jump through the anticipated Ofsted hoops? (Dean, 1995:47)

Hargreaves (1995:119), writing in the same period, describes the increasingly widespread use of self-evaluation, or internal audits as he terms them, but considers this to be "an amateur enterprise", arguing that teachers are not trained in inspection skills, and may be insular or unsophisticated in approach, which is consistent with Alvik's (1997) study. From this standpoint, it can be perceived that 21st Century schools are being afforded greater respect to evaluate their own affairs, and their heads have arguably received more specific training through the NPQH. However, a more cynical view may be that the previous 'top down' inspection approach was becoming prohibitively expensive so an alternative had to be sought.

Ofsted express best self-evaluation as:

> An integral part of the culture and not simply a paper exercise completed for bureaucratic purposes. (Ofsted, 2006:1)

It can thus be argued that although self-evaluation can be considered an inspection of one's own school, it is best practice to embrace the

process and use the findings for one's own purposes, rather than just focusing on a visit from Ofsted every few years. This fits with MacBeath and Sugimine's (2003:230) viewpoint, where they argue that "self-evaluation should be differentiated from assessment". They explain that assessment has criteria set by an external body, whereas self-evaluation allows school staff to take control of the process and use it to inform their practice. MacBeath quotes Leicestershire Local Authority's maxim to their schools:

> A school always prepared for inspection, but not always preparing for inspection, is a self-evaluating school. (MacBeath, 2006b:7)

This again implies that schools, and their headteachers, who take control of the self-evaluation process and use it to inform their regular work will achieve the best outcomes. MacBeath's view of the continuous nature of school self-evaluation is confirmed in his work in European schools:

> Self-evaluation has no beginning: it has no end, either, because it is always growing and improving. (MacBeath *et al*, 2000:94)

This stance indicates the all-encompassing nature of self-evaluation, which will be constantly evolving to help ensure school effectiveness. Plowright (2007:374) agrees that Ofsted's increased focus on self-evaluation is reflected in international developments, due to similar

decentralization and "devolved decision-making power to school managers". He goes on to describe how the SEF is "at the heart of the new inspection framework".

The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)

This long and detailed proforma was introduced as part of NRwS to encapsulate required self-evaluation themes in one document. Although it has never been mandatory, schools have been required to provide an alternative if it is not used, and in practice almost all schools have completed a SEF, to provide information for school inspectors when planning a visit. De Waal (2008:10) makes the important point that Ofsted will use the quality of self-evaluation to indicate how effective school leadership is, however it can be more indicative of how competently the head has written the SEF. This suggests that it may provide inspectors with a rather superficial indicator of effectiveness. Although the initial Ofsted guidance (DFES, 2004:12) notes that completion of the SEF "is not, in itself, self-evaluation", the directive goes on to state that the SEF is almost "the school's own inspection report on itself". It can be argued that a school, and its headteacher as the SEF's main author, is on one level carrying out its own inspection, which is then merely monitored and

validated during an Ofsted visit. A distinct merging of internal and external evaluations can thus be identified.

Plowright (2007:374) confirms the SEF is a key document used by Ofsted when planning an inspection and is "crucial in evaluating the school's capacity to improve". It is, therefore, apparent that headteachers have been allowed some autonomy in the inspection process, being given the opportunity to identify a school's strengths and weaknesses. Although conversely, the fact that the SEF, or a credible alternative, has to be embraced to enable the possibility of a positive inspection outcome does indicate the high stakes to its completion for a school and its headteacher. This suggests the SEF is more concerned with external evaluation than an exercise undertaken to benefit a school. It is further evident there are other negative implications because all schools complete the same document, for instance Saunders (1999:417) argues that any form of evaluation that makes all organisations or schools conform to an identical agenda is somewhat naïve, due to the risk of important elements being lost.

On a more positive note, a National Foundation for Educational Research study (McCrone *et al*, 2007:iv) into the impact of NRwS found that schools believed SEF completion to be time-consuming,

particularly for the headteacher, but it was generally considered a useful exercise to help identify strengths and weaknesses. In McCrone *et al*'s extensive study of 1,597 schools, the majority of headteachers encourage other staff and governors to be involved in completing the SEF, although the head is found to be the main author.

Plowright and Godfrey (2008:44) scrutinized a number of early secondary school SEFs, and found there were numerous requirements for authors to make evaluative judgements about their schools and to demonstrate how school leaders helped secure improvements. They note this led to:

> Major implications for the inspection judgements about the capacity of the school's leadership. (Plowright and Godfrey, 2008:49)

This finding is noteworthy from a number of perspectives, not least that a specific element of the 'blame culture' will be apportioned to headteachers. In addition, the fact that SEF authors are expected to comment on their own performance must introduce another dimension to their evaluations. Only four out of the ten secondary school SEFs analysed by Plowright and Godfrey (2008) were considered of appropriate quality. It can be perceived that in a primary school, where the head is possibly the only author, but still

has to meet these wide-ranging expectations, there will be additional demands placed on one person.

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.1 highlighted the main concepts of evaluation and accountability, and how these interplay to work towards school effectiveness in our performativity culture. The concepts identified will now be reviewed with regard to their impact on the role of the primary headteacher.

RELATING THE CONCEPTS TO THE ROLE OF PRIMARY HEADTEACHER

A headteacher's accountability

The accountability intrinsic to the headteacher's role can have considerable implications for satisfying performativity expectations. Thomson (2009:121-129) cites a number of heads who have coped with their responsibilities in very different ways, including one primary head who came under intense pressure to resign after his school did not reach expected SATs targets, which indicates the high stakes integral to school accountability. She quotes another who argues the public accountability aspect of headship is particularly demanding:

> Leadership as a head is such a personalized thing. People who are managing directors of firms are not public figures in the same way that a head is. But a head, within your own community, is well known and if you get into trouble, it's front-page news. (Thomson, 2009:124)

It is clear that heads must recognize responsibility to their local community as one element of their public or market accountability. They also cannot ignore internal stakeholders and just focus on being held to account by official bodies. Leithwood and Jantzi state:

> Schools hold a special niche in the minds and hearts of parents as surrogates for their most precious belongings. What would possibly make us think that such unique features would not influence how successful leadership is exercised in schools? (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005:38)

This encapsulates the dilemma which is a central feature of a headteacher's role, complying with Ofsted's expectations is but one aspect. Links can be seen with many aspects of the accountability models suggested by Reder (2005) and Earley and Weindling (2004). It is evident there are several facets to being a headteacher, partly due to the public nature of the role which is comparable to leading a company, with positive outcomes for learners increasing a school's marketability. However, it becomes far more emotionally driven as heads are responsible for educating the nation's children. This will

affect individuals on a professional level, and it is easy to see how it may additionally impact personally.

MacBeath (2006b:17) states that the English government coined the phrase "intelligent accountability", which can be understood as schools taking some control of their own accountability, being held to account but having a sound understanding of the wider issues within and beyond their school. It links back to recognition of the positive benefits of self-evaluation, which MacBeath advocates by arguing that:

> Schools and teachers are likely to respond more positively and thoughtfully to external pressure and critical review when they are confident in the knowledge that they have a rich and unique story to tell, one which rises above and goes beyond the mean statistics and pushes against prevailing orthodoxies of competitive attainment. (MacBeath, 2006b:17)

It is thus perceptible that a head whom has confidence in his or her school and can celebrate its uniqueness and effectiveness, both through performativity measures and pupils' wellbeing, will be in a strong position. NPQH training documents include moral accountabilities:

> The headteacher's ethical and professional responsibilities for accountability are much wider than those prescribed in law. Headteachers have

> established a long tradition of caring for pupils and staff to standards higher than those laid down. Most headteachers feel responsible to, or for, all who have a stake in the school. (NCSL, 2006:14)

Although it is acknowledged that this government-initiated training literature is likely to promote a positive and upbeat style, as it is intended to encourage prospective headship candidates, an underlying theme is the high expectation the nation has of its headteachers. This is consistent with Earley and Weindling's (2004) recognition of moral accountability. The fact that new heads have to achieve the NPQH prior to applying for headship suggests they will take heed of the themes implicit in this government directive. It can thus be argued that moral accountability is uppermost, but must be balanced with formal accountability under the current system. MacBeath sums up the situation, by quoting a Member of Parliament speaking in 2004:

> However friendly the rhetoric, in England the bottom line was clearly articulated by David Miliband the English Junior Minister. 'Accountability drives everything. Without accountability there is no legitimacy; without legitimacy there is no support; without support there are no resources; and without resources there are no services'. (MacBeath, 2006b:17)

MacBeath's citation is particularly apt, he concedes there are positive aspects to accountability, but also makes plain that underlying these

is the hard fact that schools are held to account, and if they do not meet expectations, they will not survive. The choices that a headteacher makes to ensure the effectiveness of his or her school can thus be perceived as fundamental to its success.

Levels of autonomy enjoyed by headteachers

In the context of English schools, being an autonomous headteacher means one has the authority and freedom to set a vision for a school and to develop it to the benefit of children and other stakeholders, alongside making decisions as to what is taught, how it is taught and who is employed to deliver that teaching. Furthermore, the decisions regarding how to spend and allocate public funding will influence this autonomy. It would, however, be somewhat naïve to believe that any maintained school or its head could be totally autonomous, due to having little control over the amount of funding received and because public monies are being spent.

Moore *et al* quote one headteacher they interviewed, who explains how he deals with the many changes and new directives that occur:

> As new initiatives and new things happen in education, you then have to sort of pitch them against what you believe at the moment, and try and fit those in and work out where they fit into your

> existing philosophy.....as long as the initiative doesn't cut right across - you know - fundamental views, then you'll kind of fit in with it. (Moore *et al*, 2002:179)

From this standpoint, it is perceptible that headteachers can enjoy some autonomy within their role, although it appears the headteacher must have clearly defined beliefs concerning the future direction of their school and the confidence to uphold these.

The issue of agency with respect to the expectations of a school leader also deserves consideration. Archer (2003:1-16) describes the fundamental distinction between structure and agency, which forms the very basis of the social sciences. She argues that structure shapes the projects or situations in which people can find themselves, starting in essence from an objective stance. In contrast, agency is essentially the effect of people acting on such structures, defining their own path, so more subjective in nature. However, Archer (2003:1) notes that the "causal mechanism" between structure and agency must "transcend the divide between objectivity and subjectivity", because all structure will be influenced by people, so must have subjective elements. So, for example, the initial structure of school inspection will have been greatly influenced by prior experience, individual expertise and bodies of research, including preconceptions of what constitutes an effective school and a

successful leader, and which school practices contribute to these. Agency will come into play when individual schools and their headteachers show choice, or autonomy, in preparing for inspection, and in deciding which elements to focus on. Woods *et al* describe it thus:

> Agency.....is the importance of processes which progressively extend the degree to which individuals and groups within a school have the opportunity to take responsibility for aspects of its work. This can be considered as a proactive process of structural change. (Woods *et al*, 2004:449)

The extent of 'proactivity' which a headteacher chooses to exercise is perhaps of paramount importance, and suggests that different heads will vary the stance they take to the structure imposed, be that inspection or other elements of school leadership. Woods *et al* go on to describe some of the "agential powers" which are typified in the actions of headteachers, these include:

- Encouraging and energizing others
- Continued facilitation and reform
- Confidence to play a part
- A ready faculty for creativity which enables envisioning of alternative possibilities
- Situational analysis.....of the institutional, cultural and social contexts that characterize an organization (Woods *et al*, 2004:451-2)

Although this research particularly focuses on the importance of distributed leadership, defined as the head sharing and delegating aspects of leadership, the identification of the agential powers of a headteacher are highly relevant to this study. Taking into account the influence of the head on a school's culture, the extent to which they decide to embrace a structure or initiative will arguably be key to its importance or effect on that culture. All schools know they will be subjected to inspection, however, how the headteacher chooses to embrace this structure could perceivably influence both their input into the process and even the outcome achieved. Hence, this understanding of both agency and autonomy could perhaps prove to be empowering catalysts for heads in their approach to making any change, and to their expectations in the inspection process more specifically.

MacBeath and Myers (1999:27) describe the increased autonomy afforded heads to undertake self-evaluation as "government's gift to schools", although they explain this is the result of an increasingly competitive culture both nationally and internationally, with an underlying emphasis of ensuring that school's provide value for money and are held to account for this. They discuss that any increased autonomy, although brought about due to the failings of local bureaucracy and previous systems, had to have some sort of

trade-off. MacBeath and Myers thus describe "government's gifts to itself" as being "closer monitoring, evaluation and intervention mechanisms". Again here, the apparent contradiction of having increased self-evaluation to inform inspection, at the same time as reducing the time and money spent on inspecting makes more sense when it is understood as a form of cost-cutting exercise, by reducing inspection hours and transferring this expense to individual schools. It can thus be argued that any additional autonomy for headteachers is something of a false impression, as there is an official 'requirement' to be autonomous within self-evaluation, which actually serves to take away that autonomy and translates internal evaluation into being a part of the wider accountability agenda.

The role of headteachers in self-evaluation

A number of studies, such as those by Robinson (2007) and Marzano *et al* (2005), have found that the quality of leadership is a critical factor which helps explain the successes or failures of each individual school. Leithwood and Day (2008:1) stress the "value of leadership" for school effectiveness, and suggest it is quite surprising that empirical evidence has been quite slow in supporting this belief. From this perspective, the importance of the headteacher to self-evaluation is vital, although it supports Weindling's (1998) findings

that changes to the head's role were somewhat overlooked early in reforms.

It is argued by Devos and Verhoeven (2003:404) that there is a presupposition with self-evaluation that internal stakeholders, particularly headteachers, are the most adequate agents to make judgements about a school's performance. This indicates a level of trust being placed with school personnel, which is a positive step. However, Dunphy (2000) criticizes the benefits of self-evaluation by arguing that the people who undertake it may be the most reluctant to embrace change, as it will affect themselves most of all. In other words, there is a possibility that some individuals or organisations could be reluctant to highlight weaknesses that either may not be spotted in a short inspection, or could require a large amount of hard work to put right. Dunphy's perspective clearly grants less trust to the school workforce. Furthermore, it follows that over time such a situation could lead to a school becoming less effective as deficiencies are hidden, which is obviously the antithesis of Ofsted's intention.

Devos and Verhoeven (2003:404) stress that headteachers can exert a certain pressure on their staff to change, although they ask who will stimulate the school leaders themselves to change if self-evaluation

indicates the need for fundamental amendments to leadership? This implies that headteachers may not be as critical of their own practices as they may be of others in their staff team, although it is acknowledged that school governors and the local authority School Improvement Partner (SIP) have a line management role over the head. There may be a number of reasons for the head to not highlight problems in their school, such as a reluctance or inability to identify issues, or even a relaxed or apathetic approach in the belief that neither the governing body nor inspectors may detect a concern. Devos and Verhoeven go on to argue that external evaluation of school leadership is probably vital to indicate flaws, particularly if the leadership team is not prepared to change. Hence, this suggests that neither internal nor external evaluations will automatically lead to an effective school, as it will be dependent on the individual headteacher and his or her school's context. The solution is perhaps to find a system where self-evaluation is more highly valued, with an element of trust intrinsic to the process.

Mortimore and MacBeath (2001:246) refer to a 1999 study by the National Union of Teachers, which advocates the introduction of school self-evaluation and demonstrates how it could reach the very core of school life and address the needs of pupils, parents and staff. They argue that schools and local authorities in the United Kingdom

initially introduced their own self-evaluations as a contrast to the "narrowness and sterility" of the original Ofsted approach, which is somewhat ironical as this requirement under NRwS has overridden schools' own systems and standardized them. It is clear that Mortimore and MacBeath are espousing the value of internal evaluation as being far more likely to support school effectiveness, than the external influence of Ofsted would. It is further apparent they perceive the practice and benefits of self-evaluation to have flourished in spite of the establishment, rather than as a result of it. This supports the notion that the majority of heads and teachers will fundamentally support and develop their school, for the benefit of its pupils and their own job satisfaction, so their professional and moral accountability can be perceived as paramount.

It is asserted by Hargreaves (1995:120) that a combination of internal self-evaluation and external inspection is most likely to lead to an effective audit of a school. Devos and Verhoeven (2003:418) agree that some combination of external and internal appraisal is the ideal, as outsiders can help identify weaknesses within a school but may overlook crucial elements of the day-to-day experiences of heads, teachers and pupils. Clearly, this understanding bodes well for the success of NRwS and the emphasis it has placed on self-evaluation.

Implications of Ofsted for headteachers

A study by Fidler and Atton describes how in recent years:

> An Ofsted inspection seems to have been the nemesis for more headteachers than any other single aspect of the job. (Fidler and Atton, 2004:72)

It is apparent the inspection process can have a considerable and far-reaching impact on a school and its personnel. It is easy to appreciate how a culture of performativity has engendered a need to make comparisons between schools, which has led to blame having to be apportioned if deemed necessary. However, the impact of this on individual professionals was either not considered initially, or believed a necessary price to pay to satisfy wider cultural expectations. Jeffrey (2002:537) makes the interesting comment that "Ofsted is a team sport". This further reference to inspection being a game implies there are many players in this high-stakes activity, albeit with the headteacher acting as team leader, with the implications of losing a worrying prospect.

The "holistic values" of many heads and teachers are contrasted with the clinical approach of Ofsted, by Jeffrey and Woods (1996:325). They found the inspectorate's objective, outcome-focused approach could negatively impact upon individual teachers' emotions. Their findings suggest the teaching profession and the government have

quite starkly contrasting values, and approach the importance of education from very different standpoints, with school staff being concerned with individual pupils and their own school, whereas the government considers education as a whole but cannot become concerned with the implications of change on the personalities involved.

Earley and Weindling (2004:87) studied headteachers' early impressions of Ofsted after its inception, they found that inspections caused great anxiety and stress to both heads and teachers, most particularly, they argue, because the late 1990s was a time when it seemed almost popular to disparage teachers. Again, this ethos was possibly due to a wider focus on satisfying performativity, so necessarily distanced from any implications for the individuals involved. During the recent past, there have even been reports (see Sapsted, 2007) of heads and class teachers committing suicide, allegedly due to the worry and pressures of impending inspections. In consideration of these tragic circumstances, it is evident the threat of inspection may weigh particularly heavily on some types of personality.

A more positive view is taken by Ouston and Davies (1998:13-24), they found that heads who made the most of inspection were those

who were as constructive and proactive as they could be, given the nature of the process. They carried out large scale postal surveys with schools that had undergone inspection at specific periods throughout the 1990s and found that 69 per cent of senior leadership staff were encouraged by their Ofsted reports and used them to instigate improvements. This positive attitude could best be described as developing a constructive and empowered relationship with inspectors and having evidence readily available for scrutiny. Ouston and Davies' stance is akin to the identification of agential powers in headteachers, as described by Woods *et al* (2004). It would thus seem there is a real need for schools to take the initiative to work on their own school development and preparation for inspection, rather than just having an inspection 'done to them' and thereafter carrying on much as before, until the next visit is anticipated. MacBeath (2008:390) also distinguishes between the success of school leaders that see self-evaluation and external inspection as an opportunity, with those who often do less well when they perceive the process to be a threat. Again, this intimates the importance for headteachers to take a confident stance, with a positive approach having considerable impact on a head's ability to lead a school through a successful inspection.

The evidence cited here suggests that early experiences of Ofsted and the potentially negative impact of seemingly having an inspection 'done to you' have paved the way for schools to more fully embrace NRwS, with its greater opportunities for schools to identify their own strengths and areas for development by self-evaluation, if they choose to actively engage with the process and play the 'inspection game'.

CONCLUSION

Themes apparent in the literature reviewed

The literature reviewed suggests the inspection process is not necessarily based on improving schools, but making judgements at a particular moment, measuring what has been achieved and comparing this with the situation in other settings, in order to hold a school to account as a major aspect of the performativity expectations of contemporary education.

The evidence indicates that the role of headteacher has many elements. There are a multitude of tasks to accomplish, many stakeholders to consider, an organisation to develop whilst essentially running a multi-faceted business, which demonstrates

value for money whilst delivering positive results. The necessity for accurate and comprehensive self-evaluation will bring heavy demands, and can almost amount to a school's inspection of itself. Furthermore, the recognition that being a headteacher has high stakes, and success is dependent on meeting government expectations, can weigh heavily.

Undoubtedly the inspection regime can prove one of the most daunting aspects of headship, although the literature suggests that a positive attitude may help towards achieving the best outcome. It is apparent that an individual headteacher's approach, both that learned and that intrinsic to their personality traits, will play some part in how s/he runs their school and how the relationship with Ofsted is embarked upon. A brief reflection on the literature from my perspective as a current practitioner will follow.

Reflecting on the literature from my perspective as a primary headteacher

My aim with this review is to present a balanced view of literature relevant to the conceptual framework. Exploring relevant research has enabled me to reflect on my own headship role and the features which help to constitute a successful school. The discussion

surrounding what it means for a school to be effective is notable, in particular MacBeath's (1999:15) observation that a school will be perceived very differently from different viewpoints resonated. Being the head gives but one angle of school effectiveness, and a pupil, parent, member of staff, governor or inspector may see things with some contrast. From this stance, it is understandable in our climate of performativity that the need has developed to form a seemingly objective judgement of a school and to make comparisons between establishments, all of which are unique in many aspects. An Ofsted judgement has a considerable influence on the popularity of a school and helps determine whether it will be an attractive contender for prospective parents. The demands of society now differ appreciably from when I was at school in the 1960s and 1970s, when one went to the local primary and, together with all of your classmates, you moved on to the local secondary. The choice was not there. In many ways, it is disappointing that education has become a victim of market forces, although research, such as that by Mortimore and MacBeath (2001:233), indicates the importance of an effective school for the future prospects of its pupils, which helps to explain the impetus for change.

It is particularly noteworthy that a significant proportion of the literature studied is fairly negative or critical of the inspection

process, this is mainly in relation to the detrimental effect on school staff and concerns as to whether inspection serves any practical purpose for a school or its pupils. The issue of performativity is of major concern, due to the reliance on test data to prove a school's worth. This certainly corresponds with my own experience; the dependence on eighteen or so pupils to achieve high marks in their Key Stage 2 SATs examinations is an incredibly stressful part of my role. Schools can often be criticized for 'teaching to the test' and I certainly could not condone this in my school, although I feel we would be letting down our children if they did not receive some SATs preparation. This mostly comprises consolidation of basic numeracy and literacy skills, which should serve the pupils well long after SATs week. However, I would be less than honest if I did not concur that this examination groundwork has that second dimension, to help show the school as a whole in its best possible light. Again I hark back to my own primary school days, I remember our end of year tests and the pride felt when I received a prize for being first, second or third in the class. Indeed those books, with their inscriptions, are still on my shelves today. I suppose, with the confidence of youth, I gave scant regard to those children who never gained a prize, but I probably felt that I had played that particular game and won. I am sure my own headteacher gained satisfaction

from a job well done, but possibly felt less external pressure with no league tables or such overt public naming and shaming.

The issue of game playing within the inspection process, as identified by Jeffrey (2002:537) and Fidler and Atton (2004:237), has proved of great relevance. Preparing my school for an Ofsted inspection is a major part of my role, the fact that I do not necessarily agree with all of the rules and am well aware that the goalposts, or targets, are subject to change can only add to the vulnerability sometimes felt, as described by Thomson (2009:2). I am well aware that it is 'my head on the block', if standards in my school begin to fall. As a fairly new headteacher I certainly do not have the confidence, or perhaps foolhardiness, to question or oppose the wider system. From my perspective, this is the process of inspection that I was appointed to deal with, so my role is to handle it in the best way possible for the benefit of my school. I play the game. An acknowledgement of my own agency is important to this understanding.

Some of the more positive research into inspection comes from authors such as Woods *et al* (2004) and Ouston and Davies (1998). They found that headteachers who demonstrate positive agency, by undertaking their role in a proactive and enthusiastic manner tend to facilitate the most successful school cultures. The identification of a

school's culture again resonates with my experience; I like to consider that my staff team engender a collaborative approach, which makes our school a purposeful and energizing place to work. I appreciate this recognition is purely from my own perspective, which could vary greatly from other school stakeholders, although feedback that I receive tends to confirm my view. Albeit this could be what I want to hear! However, I am confident that my school is a happy place and the children enjoy all of their learning, SATs are but one aspect of a rich primary school life. I recognize the school is in a fairly buoyant socio-economic area, although the children hail from a wide variety of circumstances. Despite the positive environment, however, I believe that our pupils almost 'buy in' to the collaborative ethos. There is something of a virtuous circle, on a simplistic level the children witness others doing well, receiving praise and enjoying school life, so younger ones aspire to maintain this ethos.

Is my school's culture a result of, what I consider to be, my charismatic leadership? Or, indeed, is my leadership moulded by the school and its culture? I would probably have to adopt a quite different style to deal with major behavioural, attendance or academic weaknesses. Do all headteachers aspire to charismatic leadership is another question to consider. Or is this aspiration a

symptom of my agency or my innate character and previous life experiences?

It is evident that inspection has proved to be a positive experience for my school in the recent past, being judged as outstanding has afforded the school many benefits and an enhanced status in the local community. An additional consequence personally has been the increased confidence in my role that such approbation has engendered, which in turn has led to greater trust being placed in me as a leader, both internally and externally. This has allowed me additional trust or "earned autonomy", as identified by Robinson (2011:76), and thus more opportunity to exercise my agential powers.

I am also aware that I am a product of the more standardized system of school leadership practised in the 21st Century, as I hold the NPQH qualification. Have I been manipulated, or almost indoctrinated, by the underlying national agenda? I am inclined to argue that the NPQH provides opportunity to understand and reflect on my role alongside fellow professionals, which is quite a positive initiative. Nevertheless, it is apparent that my own experiences of inspection are at considerable variance to many other headteachers and do not correspond with much of the literature presented. A key objective of this study, therefore, is to enquire as to whether other

primary headteachers have had similar experiences to my own and if any trends can be identified.

In Chapter 3, the methodology and methods chosen to facilitate the study are described.

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CHAPTER 3

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RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS OF ENQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to set the study within the field of educational research methodology. Firstly, wider research concepts are briefly explored, alongside a discussion of practitioner research and my place as a researcher on the insider-outsider continuum. This will be followed by a consideration of adopting a mixed methods approach.

The research design chosen and the rationale for this is discussed. The instruments used are then described, including the efforts made to ensure authenticity and to address relevant ethical issues. Finally, a description of the data analysis undertaken is included.

The philosophy behind the methodology

The study explores the views and perceptions of primary headteachers and is deemed to be educational research, encompassed in the wider field of social science. Cohen *et al* describe social science research as:

> Giving precise meaning to a set of concepts which enable them [social scientists] to shape their perceptions of the world in a particular way, to represent that slice of reality which is their special study. (Cohen *et al*, 2005:14)

Hence, educational research is an attempt to explore and explain phenomena in the field of education. This is achieved by identification of a topic or problem, using prior knowledge and research to inform our understanding, and then designing a valid and reliable study which can add to that body of research.

Morrison (2007:34) stresses the importance of having a sound awareness of the research methodology adopted, which is the fundamental approach taken for any research and the philosophy underlying it. Punch (2009:15) describes methodology as, "theory about the method". Thus it is vital to not only be clear about *how* educational research is carried out, but to be able to state *why* this

approach is the most advantageous. McKenzie summarizes this second, fundamental question:

> What is the relation between what we see and understand (our claims to 'know' and our theories of knowledge or epistemology) and that which is reality (our sense of being or ontology)? In other words, how do we go about creating knowledge about the world in which we live? (McKenzie, 1997:9)

Striving for reality is fundamental to any piece of research, in order to make the findings as valuable and authentic as possible. It could be perceived that a study must be objective to be of worth, although Burgess *et al* (2006:53-4) ask, from an ontological stance, whether objectivity is reality or is it gained from our own understanding. This question is fundamental to a consideration of the purposes of research, generally any study will start from an identification of what is real, but it is problematic to ensure that any concept or phenomenon is truly objective, when it is subjected to human influence. This corresponds with MacBeath's (1999:73) analogy of temperature, a seemingly objective measure, being perceived very differently by different people. This study was informed to some extent by my own knowledge and experiences, although it is acknowledged there will have been many influences on me as a person, a headteacher and a researcher, which could impact on my research. The epistemological question to consider for the study then

would be, is knowledge hard and real or is it soft and subjective? Furthermore, is a subjective understanding weak or inferior, or is it the best we can hope to achieve when we know that true objectivity is unachievable? It is, therefore, apparent that what initially appears to be a simple concept is laden with assumptions.

An alternative approach to designing a research study is offered by Plowright (2011:181) in his Framework for an Integrated Methodology (FraIM). He suggests that rather than philosophy determining the methodology adopted, it makes more sense to consider that the methodology chosen will shape the theory. This is derived from a pragmatist approach by arguing that knowledge and reality are constantly evolving. Plowright explains his viewpoint:

> This means that beliefs are 'work in progress' and therefore are subject to change, amendment and revision. Knowledge and understanding, therefore, are neither static nor certain. (Plowright, 2011:184)

This standpoint is quite empowering from the perspective of an individual researcher in that there remains real scope to add to knowledge.

Bassey defines educational research as:

> Critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action. This is the kind of value-laden research that....is itself educational because of its stated intention to 'inform'. (Bassey, 1999:39)

The reference to 'value-laden research' is pertinent because it must be acknowledged that a researcher's own values may impact on his or her approach to research. From this understanding it is clear that some subjectivity will permeate any practitioner research. Anderson (2003:12) comments that many educationalists hold very strong beliefs and values, so it is important to be wary of allowing these to influence research unduly. Furthermore, Morrison (2007:13) stresses that some educational research is viewed with scepticism by education professionals themselves, either because the work is not respected due to "academic elitism" (which could be on the part of the educationalists or academia) or because it is neither felt to be accessible nor perceived of relevance. For example, the importance of research into educational leadership has been questioned by Griffiths (1998) who argues it may only reflect the needs and interests of school leaders, rather than the children or teachers. It was thus important to be aware of these considerations from the outset, in an endeavour to make the study of value.

Different approaches to carrying out research

At a simplistic level, social science methodology has two basic approaches, namely quantitative and qualitative. Essentially, quantitative research generates and analyses numerical data, often on a large scale. In contrast, qualitative research is typified by methodologies which explore the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of individuals, generally focusing on fewer subjects but in greater depth. Dawson (2009:15) outlines the long history of debate between the merits and shortcomings of one methodological approach over the other, with much argument focusing on which is better or which is more 'scientific' by engendering the most valid and reliable findings.

Traditionally, quantitative research has been perceived as more systematic, coming from a positivist perspective. Positivists principally use methods of data collection such as surveys, from which objective, statistical deductions can be made. However, Punch points out that:

> Information about the world does not occur naturally in the form of numbers. It is we, as researchers, who turn the data into numbers. (Punch, 2009:85)

From this standpoint, reducing human action to an arithmetical form could be perceived naïve or superficial, as statistical data may miss meaningful themes. It is further apparent there is potential for bias, depending on the statistics collected and how these are analysed.

Interpretivists are most likely to use qualitative methods, including interviews, from which they can interpret their subjects' actions or other phenomena, by taking a more naturalistic stance, with their research designed to explore how humans choose to construct their own environment.

Again, Plowright's (2011:2-3) alternative FraIM framework moves on the debate by rejecting the traditional distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods, indeed he even dismisses the "Q Words". However, his approach goes much further than mere semantics as he advocates the integration of the different elements which make up the research process, so the findings are perceived as having greater importance than the methodology used to generate them.

With all educational research it is implicit that there is a common aim to investigate and help explain concepts and issues, albeit from different approaches. Cohen *et al* describe this as being:

> Essentially concerned with understanding phenomena through two different lenses. (Cohen *et al*, 2005:27)

So, the intention is to find out as much as possible about a subject by any means available. Hence, the method can be considered a useful tool to garner useful data, although is of secondary importance to the information collected. This understanding is fundamental to the study, and leads to a consideration of taking a mixed methods approach.

Mixed methods research

Punch (2009) outlines that quantitative research was dominant in educational research up until the 1970s, but then was increasingly replaced by qualitative methods. However, he describes how researchers in the 1990s "began to see past the either-or thinking of the paradigm wars" (Punch, 2009:289). This led to a greater interest in mixed methods research, which is now considered a distinct design in its own right. He defines mixed methods as:

> Research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study. (Punch, 2009:298)

There are a wide variety of different approaches to designing a mixed methods study, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:54-59) outline many of these. Basically, the designs can range from being fixed to emergent, so with a fixed approach the whole method is predetermined and firmly planned from the outset. In contrast, an emergent model is one where subsequent models (either quantitative or qualitative) are added part way through the study because the first method was found wanting in some respect. Most importantly, the authors stress the necessity to match the design to the purpose of the study and to be explicit about the choice of mixed methods.

The practical advantages of taking a mixed methods approach are described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:13), who emphasize the benefits of having the freedom to choose, and adapt, the best method depending on the problem to be addressed. However, they assert that there also remains a place for distinct quantitative or qualitative studies in many situations. It thus appears most important to consider the types of knowledge which can be generated from a study and to demonstrate if a mixed methods approach is the best option. Gorard and Taylor make the noteworthy claim that:

> Quantitative and qualitative methods are.....nearly always more powerful when used in combination than in isolation. (Gorard and Taylor, 2004:5)

They contend that the advantage gained is much greater than merely using mixed methods to generate a variety of data, but by giving the capacity to integrate this in order to address research questions. So, in effect, the flexibility affords the researcher opportunity to focus on the outcome rather than being limited by the input. Gorard describes different methods of analysis, although he argues that traditional qualitative and quantitative approaches can be utilized in more innovative ways, as:

> Words can be counted, and numbers can be descriptive. Patterns are, by definition, numbers, and the things that are numbered are qualities. (Gorard, 2002:346-7)

This perspective supports Plowright's (2011) viewpoint and indicates the importance of analysing all forms of data with an open mind, using numerical information to inform narrative and vice versa, endeavouring to take a holistic approach in order to address research questions. Morrison expands on this argument by outlining the reflexivity process, which acknowledges the place of the researcher within any research. Reflexivity takes aspects of both positivism and interpretivism and:

> Allows researchers to reflect upon, and even celebrate, their key roles as contributors to, and participants in, the principles and practices of their educational research projects. (Morrison, 2007:32)

It is apparent, therefore, that the reflexive researcher will influence both what they research and how this is accomplished. Being a current educational practitioner adds a further dimension.

Practitioner research

The growing popularity of the professional doctorate in recent years has led to an increased interest in the role of practitioner research. Practitioner research in the field of education is defined by Drake and Heath (2011:1) as insider research that complements the professional lives of educationalists, or those in similar professions such as health or social care. Punch (2009:137) further describes practitioner research as "when the teacher steps back, reflects, collects information."

Drake and Heath (2011:8) note that some academics initially objected to practitioner research as they believed it difficult for professionals to "achieve an appropriate degree of critical distance" from their studies. However, they argue that its increasing popularity reflects the pace of change in society and the professions, which has brought a need for current and informed knowledge and theory. It can be perceived that due to a continuing state of flux in the education sector, it makes sense for aspects of change to be researched by those

living through, and being required to accomplish, such change. In effect, practitioner research is essentially the researcher informing wider theory, whilst the theory informs the researcher. The mutual benefits of such an approach are manifest for the future of education.

Punch (2009:40) describes how the growing popularity of practitioner research has supported interested educationalists in becoming the 'doers' of research, rather than the 'consumers'. He states that in the past, concerns were expressed that school professionals did not have the expertise to undertake authentic research, whilst many academic reports became too technical and specialised to be of practical use to those actually working in schools. However, Drake and Heath (2011:37) argue that practitioner researchers have to search for the best methodological approach, which can enable them to be both researcher and practitioner at the same time. It is easy to appreciate this can lead to additional dilemmas, not least that the researcher is then, in effect, also the 'researched', which may impact on how they themselves carry out their practice, or how they maintain the distinction between what is being researched and their professional role. Furthermore, the validity of the research, and enabling its replication may also be brought into question. Stephen Newman, a recent practitioner researcher, describes the lonely business of carrying out independent research, of maintaining his motivation

and the challenge of switching from being a researcher to carrying out normal school routines, albeit welcoming the greater insight "to view the daily life of school in a new light" (Campbell *et* al, 2009:xii, Foreword). These issues are relevant to the study and will be re-visited in my reflections in Chapter 7.

Although practitioner research can appear to be a straightforward process for an individual to investigate an aspect of their professional life, Drake and Heath (2011:100) suggest it is particularly complex because of the dilemma of finding a position on the insider-outsider continuum.

The insider-outsider continuum

The issue of research relationships is discussed by Burgess *et al* (2006:35-6), who highlight the necessity of recognising the association between the researcher and the researched, as this can impact on the information provided and how it is interpreted. As this study is concerned with exploring the experiences of primary headteachers and undertaken by a fellow head, it is vital to establish the dynamics and implications of the research relationship from the outset.

A useful definition of insider research is provided by Hellawell:

> An individual who possesses *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members. (Hellawell, 2006:484)

In contrast, outsider research can be described as:

> Research where the researcher is not *a priori* familiar with the setting and people s/he is researching. (Hellawell, 2006:485)

The importance and influence of the insider or outsider to research has a long history of debate, indeed Hellawell refers to the work of Merton (1972), who discusses the two approaches in considerable detail over thirty years previously. Merton describes the range of insider and outsider doctrines, recognising there can be extreme approaches, where it is believed that only a true insider can understand a situation or community. This could lead to an absurd situation where it is deemed that, for example, only fellow women can understand female headteachers, or that a headteacher of a rural school might not understand the role in an urban setting.

An outsider perspective can allow the researcher a level of objectivity which may not be achieved if working from the inside. It could be argued the outsider approach may reduce the possibility of bias due to introspection in a study, with this anthropological stance explained as:

> Being a stranger, an outsider in the social setting, gives the researcher scope to stand back and abstract material from the research experience. (Burgess, 1984:23)

There are clearly advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Plowright (2011:70-71) argues that outsider researchers will bring a fresh perspective, although conversely, it will take time for them to develop a secure understanding due to their unfamiliarity with a research setting. He also describes the value of insiders to a research project, due to their insight and prior knowledge, although he discusses the risk of taking too insular an approach, by becoming too involved with the participants and their context.

Lomax (2007:168) states that insider research is particularly valuable, as educational practitioners can use their own experience to inform questions posed and to help investigate the solutions. However, Punch (2009:44) argues that being an insider can become, "a two-edged sword". He cites some of the disadvantages, particularly the risk of introducing bias, as it may prove difficult to remain impartial. In addition, Punch suggests that having a vested interest in the findings and specific ethical considerations to also be of concern, especially for those researching their own establishment or its pupils, although this issue is not relevant to the study. Other ethical issues will be discussed later in the chapter.

Punch highlights the strengths and weaknesses to both positions:

> The insider may bring greater understanding but less objectivity to the research; the outsider may bring greater objectivity but less understanding. (Punch, 2009:45)

It is clearly impossible to bring nothing of oneself to a research project, although from a more heartening perspective, Punch suggests that acknowledging the potential pitfalls of being either an insider or an outsider will help to minimize their effect.

The recognition of an insider-outsider continuum has been explored by Hellawell (2006:488). He argues that all ethnographic studies can move from being a "complete participant" at one extreme, to being a "complete observer" at the other. He goes on to propose that in all research projects:

> There are subtly varying shades of 'insiderism' and 'outsiderism'.....the same researcher can slide along more than one insider-outsider continuum, and in both directions, during the research process. (Hellawell, 2006:489)

This provides a sensible perspective, as it can be appreciated that a researcher's viewpoint will change following experience and reflection, and furthermore, that it is difficult to rationalize the extreme insider or outsider perspectives, with no personal influence.

Hellawell (2006:490) takes his standpoint further by arguing there is not even just one continuum, but that the dimensions will change depending on the stage of the research, and the extent of any inside or outside perspective at that point. This stance helps to make sense of the insider-outsider dilemma and indicates the changes of perspective a researcher may experience along their research journey, and the importance of acknowledging these.

As a headteacher researching other heads, it is clearly important to use my prior knowledge of the role. This helped particularly when designing the research questions and instruments, and during interviews. However, alongside this first-hand experience, it is also vital to distance myself from that experience, to consider the issues from others' perspectives, in order to be able to research their actions and beliefs, whilst endeavouring to identify themes from the wider findings.

In practice, the study is something of a balance between being an outside or inside researcher. I am clearly an outsider to each individual school or situation, although in the widest sense could be considered an insider, due to being a fellow head and experiencing a similar working life to the participants. Hellawell argues that:

> Ideally the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the 'researched'....both empathy and alienation are useful qualities for a researcher." (Hellawell, 2006:487)

From this perspective, having inside knowledge as a fellow practitioner alongside the opportunity to reflect on the headteacher role in other settings, has helped to achieve a balanced research project, with an insight not afforded to a true outsider.

DESIGNING THE STUDY

Background to the research design

The research design came from the belief that the educational world is best understood from the standpoint of the individuals within it. This notion is important to the approach taken, as my knowledge and experience as a primary headteacher are used to identify the main themes and provide a structure for the research. Within the study there are some common threads pervading, although an understanding of how individual headteachers approach the inspection process is of key importance. The aim is to reflect on the ways in which headteachers operate within the inspection system, in order to help inform future practice, whilst moving towards establishing some generalisations about how heads in different contexts may display similar traits and what implications these could

have. Gorard (2002:350) describes Bayesian analyses, which acknowledges the prior knowledge of the researcher and the fact that any research cannot occur in a vacuum, although he argues that judgements made can be overly subjective if a researcher is an insider. It thus appears that the best approach to overcome such dilemmas is firstly to acknowledge the risks and then find the appropriate methods to overcome these.

Using mixed methods to address the research questions

Whilst designing the study, it was apparent there were advantages to using mixed methods. Morrison (2007:29) agrees the real problem is finding the "best fit" in order to effectively address a research topic. There was certainly potential in collecting the opinions of a fairly large number of headteachers in the questionnaire surveys, which generated numerical and narrative data, to investigate if there were trends evident and if these were consistent across contrasting school settings of differing sizes and locations. In addition, the opportunity to probe more deeply during interviews led to greater insight and a more personal understanding of individuals' experiences. Triangulation is a method of comparing evidence from different sources in order to help determine their accuracy or to further explore a trend or theory. Kruse and Louis state that:

> A study based on multiple methods of data collection and analysis has the potential to bear more analytical fruit than one that is limited in approach. (Kruse and Louis, 2003:166)

It was thus believed that collecting the data using different instruments would add coherence to the study. Cohen *et al* (2005:112) make the important point that, "triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity". Consequently, it was believed that taking a mixed methods approach would enhance the study's authenticity, which will be discussed in greater detail after description of the research instruments.

THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The questionnaire survey

A questionnaire was used to collect the initial data and was twice piloted before the main study. It was designed to gauge the views of a considerable number of headteachers and to investigate if there were any trends evident from their responses.

Munn and Drever (2004:2) point out that use of a questionnaire offers efficient use of time, for both the researcher and participants. This was an important consideration due to the desire to survey a sizeable number of participants. In addition, Munn and Drever stress the

positive benefits of anonymity for participants and the opportunity to ask standardised questions to a large number of people. It was believed this anonymity would encourage participants to answer honestly. However, it is important to note there are also disadvantages to questionnaires, for instance Cohen *et al* (2005:129) argue that it is difficult to clear up misunderstandings, or that some participants may be unwilling to complete open questions for varying reasons. They particularly stress the problems with ensuring the reliability and validity of the survey sample, as a too small or too large sample could easily distort the data. Gillham (2007:81) importantly emphasizes that questionnaires are rarely sufficient as the only source of research data, so it was intended from the outset to include interviewing as an additional research instrument.

Questionnaire Design

A copy of the main questionnaire is shown at *Appendix 1*. It has 24 questions in total, starting with a request for basic information about participants and their schools, followed by a combination of closed and open-type questions. The form was designed to be visually appealing and user-friendly to help encourage participation. Preece (1994:111) highlights the importance of keeping questionnaires as short as possible to help evaluation and analysis, but particularly to maintain the interest and cooperation of participants.

A fairly large font in a bold format was adopted, the pages were structured with a variety of tick boxes, comments' sections and subtitles, so that it would not appear too daunting or time-consuming. The form was limited to four A4 pages, which enabled it to be printed onto one piece of folded A3 paper, again this was planned so the task would feel less onerous to participants. The closed questions required simple yes/no responses which allowed comparisons to be made with the statistics generated. However, almost all of these invited written comments to expand upon the answers given, with the aim of garnering more qualitative data. A majority of respondents completed some or all of these comment sections.

Piloting the questionnaire

Having designed the questionnaire, it was important to ensure the wording of questions was clear and unambiguous, and even more importantly, that they addressed the research questions adequately. Cohen *et al* (2005:129) stress the necessity to pilot a questionnaire and then refine its contents, wording and length to ensure it is appropriate.

The pilot questionnaire was hand delivered to ten primary headteachers, local to the researcher. This method of delivery was

chosen to test the survey questions. An additional six questionnaires were posted to headteachers from other areas. The second delivery method was chosen to test the logistics of the process and gain an indication of expected return rate, as due to the large numbers involved it was necessary to mail the main study. Preece (1994:125) notes that response rates are often very low in postal surveys, as low as 20 per cent, which can raise substantial doubts about representativeness.

From the 16 pilot questionnaires distributed, a total of eight returns were received, these comprised of six out of those hand delivered and two postal copies. This equates to 60 per cent and 33 per cent return rates respectively. It was assumed the postal result would be the truest reflection of an expected return. Work commitments and many demands on a head's time appeared to be common problems and led to the decision to send out the main study in late September, following the busy period at the beginning of the academic year, although before heads became too engaged with monitoring and evaluation activities.

When analysing the data generated, it was evident that all responses did not explicitly address the research questions, so some questions were re-written and it was decided to carry out a second pilot study.

A total of 12 respondents completed the modified questionnaire. In particular, the format of Questions 7 and 11 was changed appreciably. Previously these questions asked respondents to rank the six responses in order of importance, but one respondent commented that this could exasperate some headteachers because they may have considered more than one of the possible options to be of equal value. Therefore, the questions were amended so that each option had its own ranking scale to provide a more balanced view. In contrast, the decision was made to keep Question 21 with a ranking-type response, as it was deemed important to establish the different degrees of accountability from the headteachers' perspectives, to make direct reference to Research Question 2.

Selecting the survey sample

It was decided to approach heads from a wide variety of different primary school settings, from urban and rural schools of all sizes across the country, so the survey data could be considered representative. In order to put some limits on the study, knowing there are approximately 17,000 primary headteachers in England (DCSF, 2010), some other form of common ground was fundamental for comparisons to be made. My own school had received a Section 5 Ofsted inspection in November 2006, so I decided to target the

headteachers of all other primary schools who had been inspected in the same month.

Plowright (2011:42-45) describes a variety of sampling techniques, these include probability and non-probability strategies, which are also known as purposive samples. In probability sampling, all members of a research population have an equal chance of being selected, which was not relevant for this study as only a proportion of all primary headteachers nationally were contacted. Those invited to complete the questionnaire consisted of a non-probability sample; Plowright (2011:42) states this type of selection is best to obtain a sample that most specifically meets the aims of the research. In practice, the strategy taken was purposive, quota sampling, as it was not a random choice. The basis for choosing this sample type was that there should have been a common, professional understanding, in that all of the heads would have been at a similar stage in the self-evaluation process, and potentially about mid-way in the cycle towards the next Ofsted visit, as the main survey was sent out in September 2008. It is, of course, difficult to confirm if this was the best sampling strategy, as headteachers who had just experienced an inspection may have felt a more heightened emotion about the process as their experience would have been more immediate. Similarly, those who were anticipating an impending visit may have

expressed greater anxiety. However, the decision for selecting this sample was an attempt to diminish such disparity as all respondents came from a similar starting point.

It was a fairly straightforward process to obtain the school details from the Ofsted website (Ofsted, 2008), as schools inspected were detailed on a month-by-month basis. 793 schools were listed as having received an inspection in November 2006, which equated to almost five per cent of all primary schools in England. This number was quite high compared with other months, which was probably due to there generally being no school holidays in November. Ironically, my own school was not included on the website as it had received an additional subject survey visit in March 2008, which was then classified as the last inspection, as this is how Ofsted compiles its database. It is apparent that a small number of other schools who received a November 2006 inspection would also have been deleted from the list due to a similar visit subsequently.

The survey was eventually sent to the 749 schools who had pupils between 4-11 years (primary age range), and had received a Section 5 inspection in November 2006. 44 of the original 793 schools listed on Ofsted's database did not meet the chosen criteria, for varying reasons. 11 schools were classified as middle or nursery schools, so

included children outside the primary range. In addition, some schools had not actually received a specific Section 5 visit. 12 schools had received a monitoring visit after being placed in a category of concern on a previous occasion, whilst 21 had received a specific subject survey during that month.

The overall Ofsted inspection outcomes for the 749 schools surveyed comprised:

Outstanding	90
Good	376
Satisfactory	283

On first glance it appeared that no schools were placed into an inadequate category, neither being given a notice to improve nor requiring special measures. This seemed somewhat unlikely, so further investigation highlighted that schools which had not met the required Ofsted standards had already been re-inspected by August 2008, when the website was accessed, hence they had also been removed from the November 2006 listing. As with schools which had received a follow-up subject survey, it would have been a very lengthy process to search for these on the entire inspection listings, and due to limited resources it was decided not to include these. However, an enquiry to Ofsted confirmed there were 57 primary

schools placed into a category of concern during the relevant month. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that the findings will not include the evidence of those 57 headteachers who may have had some of the most negative perspectives on the inspection process due to their schools' low grading.

Initially, the plan was to send the survey to a smaller proportion of the November 2006 list, carrying out a systematic sample by selecting one school and headteacher in every three listings, and then sending out reminders to these. However, it was decided to approach all potential participants with just one mailing, in order to give all the opportunity to respond. With this approach, it was believed that less time would be spent on the administration of reminders and that all heads had the opportunity to respond, so the data were considered equitable. Another benefit perceived from this approach was that it would provide potential to correlate the number of returns with schools' inspection outcomes. Hence it gave scope to investigate whether participants with a more positive grading would encourage a greater response, or alternatively whether those headteachers who had experienced more problems with the Ofsted process would be more inclined to air their grievances in a questionnaire.

The mail-out

On a practical level, there were a number of details planned to encourage a good response. Efforts included handwriting each of the envelopes, so they looked individualised and more distinctive than typewritten addresses. With the questionnaire, a letter was enclosed outlining the research and inviting a positive response. A copy is shown at *Appendix* 2. The collaborative angle was stressed, by entitling the letter, 'By a Head for Heads', with an upbeat tone designed to promote professional interest, whilst endeavouring to not introduce bias from the researcher. A stamped addressed envelope was included for returns, these were typewritten and addressed to my school address, to make the survey look professional and legitimate.

253 completed questionnaires were returned, which equated to a 34 per cent return. This necessarily means that all findings should be treated with some caution as the views of all headteachers inspected in November 2006 are not included in the study, although it is believed that the number of responses received was large enough to be noteworthy, and equated to approximately 1.5 per cent of all English primary schools at that time. Dawson (2009:54) notes that, in general, the larger the sample then the more accurate the results will

be, which bodes well for the study. However, it is still vital to ensure the data are interpreted as truthfully as possible.

Codings used for analysis

Each returned questionnaire has been categorized to distinguish between differences in school settings and individual headteachers' circumstances, such as their teaching commitment and length of service, as these factors were identified as potentially impacting on their approach to the inspection process. Each return was firstly given a numeral, in 253 sporadic numbers from 1 to 749. This code relates to the database of 749 schools initially identified according to the criteria, and the fact that 253 of those selected returned the survey. All statistics have been rounded to the nearest whole number for ease of interpretation.

Size of school

The number of pupils on roll in each school was the first variable to be categorized, with a letter coding from A to F, as shown in Table 3.1 overleaf. Although the headteacher role is fundamentally the same in all schools, it was recognised that the demands may change depending on the number of pupils, so a small school will have less personnel to delegate to, whereas a large school may potentially have

a greater quantity of issues to deal with. Either situation could have a considerable impact on the headteacher.

Table 3.1: Distribution of schools in sample according to the number of pupils on roll

No of pupils on roll	Code	Number of participants	% of total responses received
1-99	A	41	16%
100-199	B	63	25%
200-299	C	75	30%
300-399	D	42	16%
400-499	E	27	11%
500+	F	5	2%
Totals		**253**	**100%**

As can be seen from Table 3.1, 55 per cent of the total response was received from medium-sized schools in categories B and C. This was also reflected in the initial mail-out, where 52 per cent of those distributed were to such schools. At the time of the survey, the average (mean) number of pupils on roll in English primary schools was 224 (Riggall and Sharp, 2008). They report that the majority of primary schools at this time had between 100 and 299 pupils, which suggests the sample is typical of schools nationally.

Inspection outcome

Next, each response was coded using the Ofsted judgement the school received in November 2006, using the first letter of each possible outcome. It was deemed vital to identify how headteachers and their schools had fared in the inspection process, as this could perceivably impact on their experiences and attitudes. The breakdown is shown below.

Table 3.2: Distribution of return by inspection outcome

Inspection outcome	Total contacted	No. of responses	Return for inspection outcome category	Return of all responses received
	n	n	%	%
Outstanding	90	29	32%	11%
Good	376	118	31%	47%
Satisfactory	283	106	37%	42%
Inadequate	0	0	0	0
Totals	**749**	**253**	**100%**	**100%**

It is apparent that 11 per cent of the return was received from headteachers in outstanding schools. Less response was anticipated from these heads as only 90 schools out of the 749 originally invited to respond were categorised as outstanding in the 2006 inspection,

which equated to 12 per cent of the sample. The return rates from satisfactory and good schools also broadly reflect the ratio of surveys sent out to the respective groups, as 50 per cent of the questionnaires were sent to good schools and 38 per cent to those given a satisfactory outcome. However, out of the three inspection categories, it is notable that heads from satisfactory schools produced the highest return, which could indicate they were more inclined to note grievances.

Ofsted regions

A further categorization was noted with respect to the regions of the country in which the headteachers were based, as it was believed this could impact on their experiences of inspection. This was mainly because inspection teams in different areas would have received varied training, albeit all inspectors are expected to follow the Ofsted protocol for inspectors (Ofsted, 2011). In November 2006, Ofsted worked with five regional inspection providers (RISPs) who undertook the majority of inspections in English schools. In addition, a small proportion of inspections are led by HMI, who generally work with an Additional (RISP) inspector. Table 3.3 overleaf shows a breakdown by inspection regions of those who responded.

Table 3.3: **Breakdown of respondents' schools with respect to the five regional inspection providers.**

RISP	Region *	Code	Return for RISP category	Return of all responses received
			n	%
Cambridge Education	East of England	CE	55	22%
Centre for British Teachers	North West England	CB	41	16%
Nord Anglia Education	North England	NA	35	14%
Prospects Group	London South England	PG	43	17%
Tribal Group	West Midlands South England	TG	79	31%
Totals			**253**	**100%**

* For a full list of counties/regions covered by each respective RISP in November 2006, see *Appendix 3*.

Teaching commitment

Another important attribute identified for analysis was whether or not the headteacher had a teaching commitment. It was recognized this may have considerable implications for the head's wider role

and their capacity to prepare for the inspection process. Typically, a headteacher will have a greater teaching workload depending on the size of the school, as a larger budget with more staff and children will generally mean there is more funding for leadership costs and the head will teach less, although there is also likely to be increased demand on the headteacher to deal with other issues due to larger numbers of stakeholders. Hence, a smaller school is more likely to have a teaching head. Among the sample, the mean teaching time equated to 6.64 hours per week for those who were teaching at the time of the survey. Table 3.4 shows the level of teaching commitment from those who responded.

Table 3.4: Comparison of respondent heads by their teaching status

	n	%
Teaching Head	114	45%
Non-Teaching Head	139	55%
Totals	**253**	**100%**

This analysis illustrates that just under half of the questionnaire respondents had regular teaching commitments. It is recognised that this expectation may have considerable implications for the primary headteacher's role, so it was decided to carry out another analysis

comparing teaching status of the head with inspection outcome. This is shown in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5: Comparison of heads' teaching status with their schools' inspection outcomes

		Role of Headteacher	
		Teaching Head	**Non-Teaching Head**
OFSTED inspection category	**Outstanding**	9%	14%
	Good	54%	40%
	Satisfactory	37%	46%
	Totals	**114**	**139**

Table 3.5 highlights that over half of respondents with a teaching commitment gained a good inspection grading in their schools, in contrast to 46 per cent of schools with a non-teaching head which received a satisfactory inspection. The total number of responses from headteachers with an outstanding outcome was only 11 per cent of the return, which makes any trends less noteworthy. However, again it is evident there was a greater number of non-teaching heads in outstanding schools, with 19 individuals compared to 10 teaching heads gaining an outstanding outcome.

Years in post

The final categorization relates to Question 1 on the questionnaire, and is a numeral to indicate the total number of years that each respondent had been a headteacher. It was decided to not distinguish between time spent in a respondent's current school and their total years of headship. Each respondent's cumulative time spent as a headteacher was recorded as this presented the opportunity to reflect on each individual's approach and whether this varied depending on their length of service.

Summary of codings

Figure 3.1 indicates how the different attributes were referenced, to help identify questionnaire returns:

749/	A/	G/	CE/	TH/NT	15
Numerical reference from initial database	Size of school	Inspection outcome	Detail of regional RISP	Teaching commitment	Number of years of headship

Figure 3.1: Codings used for questionnaire references

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a second research instrument to triangulate the data. Ribbins describes the semi-structured interview as:

> A research conversation with a purpose [which enables the researcher to] broadly control the agenda and process of the interview, whilst leaving interviewees free, within limits, to respond as they best see fit. (Ribbins, 2007:209)

There were a small number of prepared questions, shown at *Appendix 4*. The majority of dialogue flowed from these initial questions, as interviewees were encouraged to respond as they chose, which prompted more general discussion. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:229) describe this approach as open-ended interviewing, and outline the advantages to the method, including having the opportunity to clarify responses whilst generating important information. They argue that the data generated could potentially "lead to reconceptualization of the issues under study". Thus, the open-endedness of such an approach was particularly appealing as it could produce new concepts or take the research in new directions.

The interview sample

A sample of ten headteachers was selected to take part in face-to-face interviews, following their participation in the questionnaire survey. This sample was again purposive, but was chosen for both convenience and maximal variation, which Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:174) describe as a common strategy to investigate the views of a small sample who may hold different perspectives of a central phenomenon. In this case, the heads had varying professional experience and their schools had received a variety of inspection outcomes. Furthermore, the sample was an example of convenience sampling because participants were fairly closely located, albeit they worked in a number of different counties. The characteristics of the selected group were:

- Located broadly in the English Midlands, fairly close geographically to my own school, as I visited during the school day and needed to consider my own work commitments.
- Employed as headteachers of varying size primary schools.
- Been in post for contrasting periods of time.
- Mostly based in different counties, which meant the schools were from a variety of Local Authorities and inspected by a

variety of different Ofsted providers, as a number of the RISP regions converged on the Midlands area.

- Interviewees' schools had received varying outcomes to their Ofsted inspections in November 2006, which were broadly representative of the initial sample.
- Respondents indicated on their questionnaire that they were willing to be interviewed.

Table 3.6 below depicts some basic background information about the interviewees. No further information on location has been included to ensure the interview participants remain anonymous.

Table 3.6: Information about interview participants

Code *	No of years as headteacher	Size of school	Inspection outcome
I4 Lucy	6	374	Outstanding
I8 Beth	17	193	Good
17 Clare	13	50	Good
I2 Adam	7	137	Good
I5 Isobel	5	64	Good
I6 Sara	4	234	Good
I3 Mary	20	353	Satisfactory
I9 Adrian	11	74	Satisfactory
I1 Jack	5	205	Satisfactory
I10 Joe	1	110	Satisfactory

* Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

The ten participants were coded numerically in the order that the interviews were carried out, to reference their quotations. The table lists the participants both by inspection outcome and their numbers of years of headship. These variables were noted on the original questionnaire and help to provide the context of the interviewees. It is noticeable, for instance, that Lucy (I4) is the only headteacher in the interview sample to have achieved an outstanding inspection outcome, she had only been in post for six years and her school is the largest out of the ten schools visited.

Interview design

I visited each participant's school, with visits pre-arranged during brief telephone calls and confirmation e-mails. In all instances, the headteacher firstly showed me around his or her school and during these tours there was opportunity to chat informally and build a rapport, as may be expected when professionals meet. The interviews ranged from 30 to 55 minutes in length and were digitally recorded, with the full agreement of respondents.

AUTHENTICITY

Consideration of reliability and validity

A number of steps were taken to ensure the study was as authentic as possible, by consideration of the issues of reliability and validity. Reliability can be described as:

> Essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents. (Cohen *et al*, 2005:117)

In other words, processes should be included to enable the study to be replicated, so that other researchers using similar methods in similar contexts should obtain similar results.

The second concept central to ensuring quality of measurement is validity. Cohen *et al* (2005:105) recognises there are many different kinds of validity, depending on the research approach. It can be defined as:

> Telling us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. (Bell, 1987:104)

This understanding indicates the importance of ensuring the design of research instruments will generate useful data to address the research questions. Burgess *et al* stress the complexity of aiming for validity, making the important point that:

> If the project should turn out not to be valid, then the whole enterprise is worthless. (Burgess *et al*, 2006:62)

Their perspective emphasizes that it is essential for research to be reasonable and legitimate, because if the starting point is flawed then this will diminish the process and devalue the findings.

Ethical considerations

It is vital to ensure that research gives due regard to participants. Busher and James (2007:107) stress that ethical issues are particularly important to consider in any research concerning human subjects. They note that educational research can be especially problematic, dealing as it may with children and other vulnerable groups. However, this study has perhaps less issues, being concerned with subjects who are educational professionals and who, once approached, volunteered to take part. Most ethical measures or codes of practice stress the importance of gaining "informed consent" (Cohen *et al*, 2005:51), which is defined as individuals choosing to participate, which all respondents did.

Steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of respondents throughout the study. A database was compiled of the 749 headteachers initially approached, their details already being in the public domain on the

Ofsted website. This database was stored separately from other information and respondents cannot be identified as their details were reduced to a numerical code. Respondents were given an option to provide their details on the questionnaires, many of whom did. This information was only used by the researcher to send thank you notes and to contact potential interviewees.

Due to the sensitive nature of some survey questions, particularly those which invited participants to comment on their personal feelings, it is possible that some anxiety was caused by addressing these questions. It is obviously impossible to gauge if this may have caused some potential participants to reject the questionnaire, although this possibility cannot be discounted.

Effort was made to ensure interviews were undertaken as professionally and sensitively as possible. Interviewees had indicated they were willing to take part and were advised that their anonymity was assured. They were all informed their interview was being recorded and would be later transcribed. Interview transcripts were anonymised and stored separately from other data.

During the interview conversations I was careful to maintain as neutral a stance as possible. As a serving headteacher myself, it was

important to be mindful of not introducing any preconceived notions to the interviews as this could bias the findings. Cohen *et al* stress there are three main sources of bias possible during interviews:

> The characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions. (Cohen *et al*, 2005:121)

It was believed that ethical and authenticity issues were considered and that reasonable steps were taken to limit concerns in the effort to make the study as valid as possible.

Authenticity of the research instruments

The concepts of validity and reliability were addressed in relation to the research instruments. Cohen *et al* (2005:128) state there are two main issues with ensuring validity of a postal questionnaire design. The first concern is whether participants complete the questionnaire honestly and accurately, and the second is whether those who failed to complete and return the survey would have given similar responses to those that did. It is assumed the respondents answered honestly, in that the questionnaire was directed at well-educated, professional people in their working environment, with the premise that they would treat the research seriously and as competently as possible. Furthermore, their anonymity was assured from the outset,

which hopefully encouraged frank and honest answers. There is a concern that those who chose to not complete the questionnaire may have held different views and given different responses. However, there is little to be done here other than to have an awareness of the issue, although again an assumption has been made that if headteachers had extreme views or anxieties then they would perhaps have been more inclined to complete the survey.

With respect to the interview data, it is important to acknowledge that my own professional stance would have some influence on the interviews, not least because the interviewees were aware that I was a fellow headteacher. Taking a reflexive approach, collegiality was encouraged to hopefully achieve deeper, more truthful responses than an absolute outsider may have done.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1989:199) argue that because interviews are interactions between two human beings, then it is inevitable that interviewers will bring something of themselves to the interview and, therefore, to the data. The reliability was managed to some extent by using a basic structure with a small number of questions put to participants. Every effort was made to not ask leading questions and to use direct quotations in context in the subsequent analysis, to limit any misrepresentations. Ribbins (2007:208) stresses

the importance of reporting interview data honestly, and states that the purpose of an interview is "to find out what is in somebody else's mind but not to put things there". Cohen *et al* outline the merits and disadvantages of using interviews in contrast to questionnaires, stating that it encourages greater depth in the research, and that:

> The use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals. (Cohen *et al*, 2005:267)

They further argue that because questionnaires are anonymous they tend to be more reliable by encouraging participants to be honest. Therefore, using the two instruments should have satisfactorily triangulated the data and helped to add greater insight and a human voice to the study.

It was felt that reasonable steps were taken to ensure the authenticity of the research instruments, although it is acknowledged that any social science research is essentially concerned with human beings, whose own opinions and feelings can change over time. Furthermore, the fact that this study is focused on an aspect of educational leadership that at best can be described as transient, will help explain that any replication may be subject to change.

Using inductive reasoning to explore the data generated

The themes which emerged from the data analysis have helped to address the research questions. Dawson (2009:119-120) describes this type of analysis as highly inductive, meaning the themes are not imposed by the researcher but become apparent as the study progresses.

Cohen *et al* (2005:4-5) discuss deductive and inductive reasoning, or some combination of these, as the means in which people attempt to make sense of the world. Very simply, deductive reasoning uses a theory or hypothesis to explain or test a phenomenon, whilst inductive reasoning does the reverse, studying a phenomenon to generate a theory. There are limitations to an inductive approach, as outlined by Burgess *et al* (2006:45-47). These include aiming to find a sensible balance between developing a theory, carrying out research and relating this to one's own practice, whilst not becoming unduly influenced by different approaches and philosophies. Furthermore, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:65) argue that researchers can never prove a theory by using inductive logic alone, as there will always be anomalies and not all cases can be explained. This adds weight to the endorsement of a mixed methods approach, as they go on to

suggest (2009:87) that the inductive-deductive research cycle does not have to be an either-or approach.

Inductive reasoning is generally used for qualitative data, although again Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:250) note this is not always so, similarly they argue that deductive analysis does not always have to be used for quantitative data, and that inference can be drawn from both approaches, which fits with the mixed method philosophy. This is supported by Bryman's (1988:16) view, where he argues that research is cyclical in nature, with inductive and deductive activity helping to create theory.

It is most relevant to consider how an understanding of inductive reasoning can help to make sense of the data generated in this study. Drake and Heath (2011:50) make the important point that as a practitioner's study develops they may move back and forth in their understanding, as the positions of both professional practice and research can subtly change their perspective. This acknowledgement has certainly helped in my research journey, as I have worked to make sense of what my respondents have said and how this assimilates with the literature reviewed and the research questions posed. To some extent this has meant that I have had to distance myself from the data, to scrutinize it objectively whilst using my

first-hand experience to inform the analysis. However, I recognise that the data can only be as good as the questions asked, either in the survey or during interviews, and that it is imperative to keep the overall research questions central to the study. More detailed reflection on my research journey will be included in Chapter 7.

Mixed methods analysis

Taking a mixed methods approach allowed the qualitative and quantitative data generated to be analysed in an interactive way. Greene (2007:156-7) describes the benefits of carrying out mixed methods analysis to gain both a wider perspective and a more detailed understanding of the data. She describes the work of Li *et al* (2000), who use the metaphor of rail tracks to explain different approaches to analysis. They use single-track analysis to analyse different data sets and then merge these later; parallel tracks to analyse different data separately but simultaneously; and crossover tracks analysis, which involves taking both quantitative and qualitative data and analysing this concurrently to look for comparisons with the emerging themes and interlinking the methods of collection. This third approach fits most comfortably with my study, as I chose appropriate methods which allowed some flexibility to cross-reference the collected data.

Analysis of survey data

The survey generated both numerical and narrative data. Punch (2009:261) stresses that the analysis approach will be dependent on the research questions, which in this study are essentially descriptive and mostly qualitative in nature, albeit with potential to generate some numerical information. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:257-258) explain that quantitative methods of data analysis can take either a descriptive or an inferential approach. Generally, descriptive techniques are used to summarize data and to look for patterns and trends, whilst inferential methods will test hypotheses or look for relationships between variables.

It was decided to use simple descriptive analysis of the quantitative data, which Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:206) agree is an effective method to highlight emerging themes in data. I totalled the numbers for each response and then determined the percentage of the total this comprised. This basic approach was taken to keep the analysis straightforward and to allow the comparisons made to be relevant, with the data less manipulated and subject to bias.

The survey data was entered into a Microsoft Access database. This provided the opportunity to make basic enquiries from the statistics generated and to use these to make some tentative generalizations.

The database allowed me to search on two or more of the chosen criteria in combination to look for trends or patterns, for instance comparing the number of pupils on roll (Question 2) with the inspection outcome (Question 5), or by matching the length of service of a headteacher (Question 1) with their views on accountability (Question 24). It is acknowledged that there were limitations to the database, and a higher level of sophisticated analysis would have been possible with a computer assisted research software package. However, as a lone researcher I made the decision to focus on keeping the analysis relatively simple, as the cost and time demands of becoming familiar with new software were prohibitive. Punch (2009:203) makes the pertinent comment that a software package can be a useful tool for analysis, but the researcher's design and their interpretation of the data will always be of paramount importance.

Alongside the quantitative data, the questionnaires provided a wealth of written remarks. Plowright (2011:120) explains that narrative data can be fluid and potentially ambiguous, with more scope for different interpretations in analysis. However, it is recognised that the richness of detail to be gained, by having insight into respondents' thoughts and feelings, far outweighs any disadvantages. It was important to establish a suitable level of

analysis which could help demonstrate emerging themes and issues. The design of the questionnaire certainly lent itself to gaining a mix of both numerical and narrative data. Gillham (2007:35) points out that a benefit of the method is that "there remains considerable scope for genuine discovery".

Each comment quoted is referenced using the codings outlined previously as this information helps to contextualize individual remarks. Individual respondents' use of capital letters or other extraordinary punctuation is included exactly as it was written on completed questionnaires, to help ensure authenticity.

All written comments were analysed by collecting a tally of likely categories, as outlined in Gillham (2007:64). Similar responses were categorized together and counted. For example, Question 19 invited headteachers to comment on the level of autonomy their school has in the inspection process. There were a number of quite contrasting responses, although almost one quarter of responses referred to the inspection judgements being either too data driven, too dependent on SATs results or unfairly swayed by the assessment process, all of which were categorized together under one tally. Taking such an approach meant the qualitative data collected could also be reduced to a numerical form, to enable additional statistical analysis.

Although this type of question is quite time-consuming to analyse manually, the quotations added richness to the statistical information. For instance, two comments which helped give a human voice to Question 19 were:

> Their main mantra is data, data, data, data! (484/C/G/PG/NT/2)

and:

> The process is too political and data comparisons don't work in a small school. (253/A/G/NA/TH/11)

Here it is evident that both headteachers were giving slightly differing perspectives, albeit commenting on the same issue. The former was perhaps more light-hearted or possibly pedantic, whereas the second respondent was arguably more evaluative and related the issue to the national agenda and the limitations of the inspection system.

Analysis of interview data

After completing initial analysis of the questionnaire data, ten face-to-face interviews were undertaken to triangulate the findings and to probe more deeply into issues of relevance to the research questions. Combining the data generated from the research instruments

allowed me to use the initial survey analysis to inform the interview structure. Greene (2007:126) describes this type of iterative mixed methods design, where the results of one method are utilized in sequence to develop further instruments.

Interview transcripts were scrutinized individually, with pertinent comments included in the main body of the thesis. The transcripts were further reviewed by making a series of colour-coded demarcations to link them with the research questions and the emerging themes identified from initial survey analysis. The combined data were then categorized by theme and placed in order of relevance to address each research question, with the findings detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the methodology chosen for the study, with reference made to academic literature relevant to different approaches and to help explain the reasoning behind my research design. A mixed methods approach has been taken to address the research questions. It is believed that generating both quantitative and qualitative data helps provide a broad picture of the themes

which have emerged. The distinctive issues relating to practitioner research alongside a consideration of my position on the insider-outsider continuum are discussed, to help set the study in context and to consider the personal influence I may have on the design.

It is recognised that there are strengths and limitations to both research instruments used, however, one of the main advantages to adopting a combination of methods is having the opportunity to investigate the concepts from different standpoints and hence make some tentative generalisations from the data.

The questionnaire survey was distributed to a substantial number of respondents, which allowed the opportunity to make comparisons and spot trends in the statistical data generated. Although it was a considerable task to post hard copies to a large number of potential recipients, this was rewarded with a pleasing return which should adequately represent the views of the headteachers who received an inspection in November 2006. In addition, the questionnaire gave further potential for collecting qualitative data, with individual comments on questionnaires providing a richness of detail to complement the statistical analysis. The face-to-face interviews provide triangulation to the study by exploring the research questions in greater depth through holding pertinent discussions

with a small sample of headteachers, which generated much additional narrative data.

In Chapter 4, the main findings are detailed and discussed, with the survey and interview data combined to add further coherence in using this mixed methods study to address the research questions.

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CHAPTER 4

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DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the data collected with regard to the conceptual framework identified. The questionnaire and interview data are combined to give coherence to the analysis and to help identify the emerging themes.

The analysis commences with consideration of the expectations relevant to the primary headteachers' wider role, of which Ofsted is just one aspect. An exploration of the multiple accountabilities a headteacher may experience follows, including the different approaches they may take and the emotions they may feel. Next, the balance participant headteachers achieve between the external evaluations carried out by Ofsted and their internal self-evaluations are considered. The specific implications of NRwS are then investigated, including the particular responsibilities primary heads face and the personal cost of these. The chapter concludes with a

brief account of respondents' experiences of their 2006 inspections and consideration of the potential for subjectivity in the process.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

General impressions gained of participants

The data generated from the questionnaire survey and the subsequent interviews gives a richness of detail to the study. The tone of the written and spoken comments helps provide a human voice to contextualise the numerical data. It is appropriate to use the data firstly to garner some general impressions of the headteachers who contributed to the research instruments, in order to help set the study into context.

The return response of 34 per cent and the detailed written comments indicate that questionnaire respondents are generally positive about the research topic, which suggests its relevance to primary headteachers. A typical comment is:

> I found this very interesting to complete – thank you for asking (and even acknowledging) those difficult questions! (405/B/S/CE/TH/2)

As the respondents knew the researcher to be a fellow head, it is perceivable the survey may have garnered a different response to

one sent from an 'official' standpoint. One headteacher explains her reasoning:

> There is no one to talk to about inspection as you may be deemed to be failing in your job. Thank you for giving me the chance to reflect on what I do and my concerns. (400/C/G/NA/TH/8)

A more negative perspective is illustrated in another typical response:

> You don't have to look far to find out why the position of headteacher has the highest vacancy rate in the whole of the public sector.....use your doctorate to good effect! (177/E/S/CE/NT/15)

Consequently, it is acknowledged that some responses may be biased against those in authority, although it is unfeasible to gauge how participants would have responded to a similar survey sent from an official source. Furthermore, those who declined to respond may have engaged with research they deemed to be more formally endorsed, which could have led to contrasting findings. However, on a positive note, it is reasonable to assume those heads that have gone to the trouble of returning the questionnaire are likely to have answered honestly.

The prevailing tone throughout the interviews is of a professional, constructive dialogue between headteacher colleagues. All

interviewees previously completed and returned the questionnaire, in fact, 74 per cent of questionnaire respondents specified that they were willing to be interviewed, which again indicates support for the study. A typical response at interview is:

> Your questionnaire interested me, the whole pitch of it I felt comfortable with, so I thought I'm definitely going to fill this one in. (I6)

This comment is particularly heartening as it justifies the aim of my practitioner research and indicates the relevance of the topic.

The uniqueness of primary schools

Disparities between each school setting and the differing experiences of their headteachers resonate throughout the data. Of the 749 schools initially approached, the number of pupils on roll range from just seven in one setting to 816 in the largest. The schools are situated in rural, urban and inner city locations across England. It is important to acknowledge that the unique characteristics of each school may influence the headteacher's role and their approach to the inspection process, albeit Ofsted use the same measurements in every setting. For instance, a very small school has to rely on the progress of just a few children to illustrate the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In contrast, schools with large pupil cohorts

are less dependent on each individual child's results. However, other aspects of the inspection framework are perhaps easier to illustrate in a small school. One example is the personal and cultural ethos, as every child is likely to be known well by all of the other adults and children in school, which is arguably more difficult to demonstrate with large numbers of pupils on roll.

The teaching commitment of headteachers is likely to play some part in their capacity to devote time to strategic leadership activities, so I investigated if the head's teaching status may have influenced his or her school's inspection outcome. Analysis of questionnaire returns showed that 47 per cent of respondents in good schools have no teaching commitment. This compares to 66 per cent of the heads in outstanding schools being non-teaching, which suggests the latter have more time to undertake self-evaluations in their respective schools, and this aspect of their role may have helped them to receive a higher grading. However, there are non-teaching heads in 60 per cent of satisfactory schools which challenges the notion.

Table 4.1 overleaf helps clarify the statistics, as it shows that a greater proportion (52 and 60 per cent) of the largest schools (Codes E and F) surveyed received a satisfactory outcome, and 92 per cent of the heads in these largest schools do not have a teaching commitment.

Consequently, the size of a school could arguably be an indicator of inspection outcome.

Table 4.1: The number of pupils on roll compared with schools' inspection outcomes

	Number of pupils on roll					
	A 1-99	**B** 100-199	**C** 200-299	**D** 300-399	**E** 400-499	**F** 500+
Outstanding	15%	8%	13%	12%	11%	0
Good	44%	57%	47%	40%	37%	40%
Satisfactory	41%	35%	40%	48%	52%	60%
Totals	**41**	**63**	**75**	**42**	**27**	**5**

Further trends can be identified from the table, for instance, 15 per cent of the schools in Code A received an outstanding inspection whereas none of the largest school did. Conversely, 11 per cent of schools in Code E received an outstanding outcome, compared with 8 per cent of schools in Code B, which have much smaller cohorts. Schools in Codes A and B are more likely to have a teaching head, which suggests there will also be other factors which influence an inspection. Furthermore, 41 per cent of the smallest schools surveyed had a satisfactory inspection compared to 40 per cent of schools in Code C, which are considerably larger establishments. This illustrates that the size of school alone cannot predict an

inspection outcome. However, by taking each inspection grading and ranking the outcome by size of school, a pattern is perceptible. This is shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Ranking inspection outcomes with the size of school

	Inspection outcome		
	Outstanding	**Good**	**Satisfactory**
Rank order of size of school	A	B	F
	C	C	E
	D	A	D
	E	D	A
	B	E	C
	F	F	B

Identifying trends is more problematic with a small sample, such as comparing outstanding schools and their number on roll. However, a distinct pattern emerges when looking specifically at those schools which achieved a good or satisfactory inspection. Here it is notable that the ranking order for good schools is actually reversed when focusing on satisfactory schools. The data highlights that the greatest proportion of Code B schools received a good outcome, compared to the smallest proportion of Code F schools. This situation is the direct inverse for those judged satisfactory, as the greatest proportion of

Code F schools received this outcome and the least proportion of Code B schools.

A further analysis in Table 4.3 shows the proportions of each inspection outcome with respect to the different size schools.

Table 4.3: Comparing the proportions of inspection outcomes with size of school

Proportion of total outcomes	Number on roll					
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**
	1-99	**100-199**	**200-299**	**300-399**	**400-499**	**500+**
Greatest	G	G	G	S	S	S
	S	S	S	G	G	G
Lowest	O	O	O	O	O	O
Totals	**41**	**63**	**75**	**42**	**27**	**5**

Schools that achieved outstanding status comprise the lowest proportion in all sizes of school. However, a marked contrast is evident between schools in Codes A, B and C which had the greatest proportion of good inspections, in comparison to the larger schools (Codes D, E and F) which received the greatest proportion of

satisfactory judgements. This finding is represented further in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Breakdown of inspection outcomes comparing smaller schools (Codes A-C) and larger schools (Codes D-F)

Inspection outcome	Number on roll	
	A/B/C	D/E/F
	1-299	300-500+
Outstanding	12%	9%
Good	50%	37%
Satisfactory	38%	53%
Totals	**179**	**74**

This simple analysis further highlights the contrast between the differing inspection outcomes of smaller and larger schools. However, because some of the smallest schools do receive a satisfactory outcome and some larger schools attain outstanding status, it suggests that the uniqueness of each school, its personnel and individual circumstances will all interplay to influence the inspection judgements.

Questionnaire comments help to augment the quantitative data collected, for instance, one head states:

> Ofsted have a changing pre-decided agenda that we can't second guess and I've stopped trying to guess. (498/C/G/CE/NT/18)

Although the comment is of note with respect to many aspects of the study, it is more enlightening when the headteacher's individual context is considered. For instance, her relatively large school received a good inspection outcome, she is a non-teaching head and has been in post for 18 years. Using this information, it is perceivable that the respondent has adopted a passive acceptance of the inspection process, which is a compromise this experienced headteacher has chosen because she recognises that she cannot change the system. Although heads have little influence over the Ofsted framework, this initial data analysis suggests that all headteachers will hold their own opinions of the process and the changes made under NRwS.

Heads' opinions of the New Relationship

From Table 3.2 (page 165), it can be seen that 37 per cent of the headteachers of satisfactory schools returned the questionnaire, whereas there was a 32 and 31 per cent return from good and outstanding schools respectively. This could indicate that satisfactory heads are more inclined to note grievances, which may

have influenced the data to some extent. To investigate this assumption, the opinions of respondents were sought with respect to their perceptions of the changes made under NRwS, and compared with their schools' inspection outcomes. This information is detailed in Table 4.5 below:

Table 4.5: Schools' inspection outcomes compared with their headteachers' opinions of changes to inspection

	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory
Better	62%	64%	47%
Same	31%	25%	26%
Worse	7%	11%	27%
Totals	**29**	**118**	**106**

The table shows that 27 per cent of headteachers from satisfactory schools believe that changes made under NRwS were for the worse. This compares with 11 per cent from good schools and 7 per cent from outstanding schools. Furthermore, 47 per cent of heads in satisfactory schools believe the changes were better, compared to 64 per cent from good schools and 62 per cent of headteachers from outstanding schools. This is perhaps not surprising as those who received the most positive outcomes are probably less likely to feel

negative about NRwS, whereas those who fared less well may be more inclined to place some blame on the process.

Table 4.6 provides a contrasting perspective, by taking the respondents' opinions of changes to the inspection process and comparing these with the inspection outcomes received in their respective schools.

Table 4.6: Comparison of headteachers' opinions of changes to inspection compared with their inspection outcomes

	Better	Same	Worse
Outstanding	13%	14%	5%
Good	52%	45%	29%
Satisfactory	35%	41%	66%
Totals	**143**	**66**	**44**

The comparison illustrates that 52 per cent of those headteachers who believe the changes to inspection to be better are in good schools, whilst 35 per cent are in satisfactory schools. This comprises the majority of 143 of all 253 responses. 66 heads consider the inspection process to be the same as previous frameworks, with 14 per cent of these from outstanding schools, 45 per cent from good schools and 41 per cent from satisfactory schools. The greatest

contrast is found in the 44 respondents who felt the changes made were for the worse, as 66 per cent of these heads were in satisfactory schools, 29 per cent in good schools and only 5 per cent in outstanding schools.

Southworth (1998) and De Waal (2008) argue that an Ofsted inspection is considered the main threat for many headteachers, which suggests the type of inspection carried out makes little difference to the anxiety felt for many heads. Indeed, one headteacher at interview clarifies this stance:

> Ofsted is Ofsted however they frame it. It is still a cloud above my head to be honest, if the goalposts keep moving then how can we ever keep them satisfied? (I2)

It is noteworthy that Adam, speaking here during interview as head of a school judged to be good, still feels under pressure to sustain a satisfactory judgement. The data suggests that all primary headteachers, whatever their school's inspection outcome, feel somewhat daunted by the inspection process. However, it is also apparent that the primary headship role itself is complex and there will be many other responsibilities that have to be met alongside the head's input into the inspection process.

Doing the day job

It is necessary to acknowledge the variety of tasks and duties that primary headteachers undertake whilst doing the 'day job' and to consider how the inspection process fits into this. The multiplicity of demands within the head's role is a recurring theme in many responses, one participant sums it up:

> In some respects it's the 'spinning plates' scenario. (218/B/S/CB/NT/11)

This suggests the respondent finds it problematic to complete any task to her satisfaction before something else takes precedence. A number of heads make reference to this 'fire-fighting' aspect of the role, when immediate needs supersede strategic monitoring. This comment depicts the dilemma:

> I'd love to have time to observe my teachers and write the SEF or development plans, but the phone goes, then there's a fight to deal with, or angry parents coming in, and these things take over. (325/B/S/PG/NT/4)

Thus, management rather than leadership elements of headship become uppermost, and must be dealt with before higher-order strategy can occur, which supports Whitaker's (1993:134) findings.

At interview, Jack also highlights the all-encompassing nature of the job:

> I was told on NPQH there'll come a day when you go to a school and you'll see two people with heads down a manhole, one will be the head, and it's happened. I thought, 'why am I looking down a manhole, what do I know about manholes'? *(Laughter)* (I1)

This suggests that in primary schools the head has to deal with a variety of menial or minor tasks, either to ensure the smooth running of a school or because there is simply no-one else to do them. It is apparent that often class teachers or teaching assistants, albeit less senior, have more clearly defined roles and are not expected to leave their class or deviate from their timetable to deal with other issues. Blank's (1987:70) recognition of the differing educative and administrative roles of a headteacher is pertinent, and may be especially evident in a small school where there are few other staff to call upon.

Challenges of headship

Many questionnaire comments refer to the importance of the role from the head's perspective, the following response is typical:

> It is a very important job. It always has been and always will be. (90/B/O/CB/NT/8)

This respondent is arguably referring to the overall expectations of headship, alongside an intrinsic moral accountability. A similar mind-set permeates many other responses and comments are often tempered by acknowledgement of the challenges brought, illustrated by the following quotations:

> It's a great pressure being a head, in many ways an honour, but unrelenting! There is that desire to 'get it right' so the outcome is what my school deserves. (130/D/G/NA/TH/10)

> I believe the position of headteacher is getting more difficult day by day. It's still a great job but so many people require a little bit of you. Ofsted is just one part. (64/C/S/TG/NT/11)

Multiple accountabilities are palpable. Over half of the respondents also mention the pressures faced by the headteacher specifically, together with the inherent loneliness implicit to the role. For instance, one says:

> There is no-one to talk to about all of this as people will think you can't hack it or are failing. It's good to sound off to another head but with no pressure! (692/A/S/TG/TH/7)

This type of reaction is possibly one reason there was a fairly high return to the questionnaire, as it may have proved quite cathartic to

express concerns in an anonymous forum to a fellow practitioner. Not all heads mention feeling pressured but still acknowledge the all-encompassing role:

> I still really quite like my job....but it is not just a job, it is completely absorbing and you live and breathe it! (237/D/O/PG/NT/5)

This suggests that different personalities will respond to the challenges of headship in differing ways, which may result in some personal conflict, as Crawford (2009:20-22) discusses. For instance, one headteacher after six years in post has quite a contrasting viewpoint:

> Being a headteacher is a full-time commitment both professionally and personally and I have found the realisation of such a huge responsibility, to the point of considering changing my career. (399/C/S/NA/NT/6)

This is an extreme example, but there is growing concern about difficulties in recruiting and retaining primary headteachers, as identified by Thomson (2009:17). The expectations on one person to make many important and wide-ranging decisions may contribute to this sense of anxiety. The situation is summed up by Mary during interview:

> I find it quite stressful, because obviously they all want a different strand, and you have to see it from

> all of their angles.....they all want a different piece of the picture. (I3)

The commitment each headteacher gives to the role is overwhelming throughout interviews, for instance, Mary is 62 years old and has led her school for over 20 years, but has not retired as her governing body has been unable to appoint a suitable successor:

> They might not appoint a head again and then what are they going to do? They'll have to ship somebody in and all this nonsense, I don't want that for the school really...you do have that feeling about your relationship with your school. (I3)

Mary's moral accountability is evident in this remark. She goes on to sum up the head's role:

> That's the only way I think we succeed in our job, it's giving that little bit extra that you don't get elsewhere. (I3)

There seems little question that headteachers rate their jobs highly; the commitment and the values embedded therein permeate the questionnaire comments and interview data. However, the way each individual undertakes the role and the balance achieved between personal beliefs and satisfying performativity expectations is perhaps key to effective headship, which leads to consideration of the primary headteacher's autonomy.

A head's autonomy

Over half of the heads who responded to the questionnaire comment that they enjoy the extent of autonomy allowed under NRwS, with 63 per cent believing they are allowed sufficient freedom within the inspection process. Notably, 72 per cent of respondents felt that having such autonomy affects them on a personal level. One head expresses her feelings:

> I do feel autonomous and in control, but there is an incredible pressure to perform at your best for self-evaluation whilst dealing with the multitude of 'details' of running a school. (422/D/G/PG/NT/10)

This comment indicates that any relative freedom under NRwS has to be counterbalanced with performing a wide variety of everyday tasks to ensure the smooth running of a school, whilst paying due regard to the inherent performativity measures. The data suggests that some headteachers are quite pragmatic about their autonomy, for instance, one head remarks:

> Yes, I am [autonomous] but it goes with the job! The decisions I make affect the school and everyone in it. (36/E/G/CB/NT/20)

This indicates that exercising some choice in deciding on the future direction of a school to be a major element of headship. There are many quite negative comments, such as:

> It worries me sick! (91/A/G/CE/TH/2)

and from a more humorous standpoint:

> Just occasionally decisions stop me sleeping at night and I look at the shelf-stackers in Tesco with envy. But that's only on a bad day!! (310/B/G/TG/TH/3)

Here, the differing ways that heads cope with the autonomy in their role is evident, and may help explain different styles of leadership adopted. However, the fact that heads are free to choose their approach indicates there is opportunity for autonomy, with some trust afforded from both the governing body and external stakeholders. When discussing autonomy during interviews, it is evident that heads feel some independence over processes in their schools. Sara speaks positively:

> On a day-to-day level I can pretty much make the decisions I want to make, but where it takes the school to, you know further down the road, is crucial isn't it? (I6)

Lucy sums up her approach:

> If you're a good school and you're doing the practices that you think are good for a school anyway....it doesn't matter if someone comes in and inspects them. (I4)

Lucy's confident approach implies a strong sense of agency and demonstrates the belief she has in her own capabilities. Adam gives a similar response, and indicates the balance he has established in order to fulfil his role:

> I try to concentrate on my day job, being a headteacher and leading my school to the best of my ability. The virtuous circle here is that, if I am enjoying my job, my pupils are enjoying coming to school and my staff like to work here, then we are a successful school. My only task then is persuading Ofsted that we are! (I2)

The implications of inspection are intrinsic to this head's perception of his role, albeit interviewees were aware this was the focus of the study, so may have afforded it more prominence. Adam's description of a virtuous circle is of particular significance and will be explored further in Chapter 5. It is notable that Adam identifies what school effectiveness means to him, but then perceives his task as matching this with the performativity expectations implicit to Ofsted's judgements. From this perspective, effectiveness is not just about reaching targets but includes the more subjective element of enjoyment. Adopting such an approach arguably needs a confident individual to effect, who is sure of his or her own beliefs and can balance them alongside school performance and the accountabilities intrinsic to primary headship.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Comparing different accountabilities

Survey questions concerning accountability generated a strong reaction from respondents. The data highlights a number of issues raised from inviting heads to compare different types of accountability and the impact of these on their role. Question 21 of the questionnaire (see *Appendix 1*) investigates to whom headteachers consider they are most accountable. A summary of their responses is shown in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7: Headteachers' responses to questionnaire Question 21

Most accountable			Least accountable		
Group	**n**	**%**	**Group**	**n**	**%**
Pupils	119	47%	Ofsted	101	41%
Ofsted	50	20%	LA	41	17%
Parents	25	10%	Staff	33	13%
GB	22	9%	GB	26	10%
LA	21	8%	Parents	24	10%
Staff	16	6%	Pupils	23	9%
Totals	**253**	**100%**	**Totals**	**248**	**100%**

Accountability to pupils is highest for 47 per cent of respondents, which suggests that moral accountability for almost half of the headteachers is uppermost. However, it is notable that 9 per cent of heads feel least accountability towards their pupils, which is perhaps surprising but implies the conflict that individuals may experience as they try to balance the demands of multiple accountabilities. Rather than being uncaring this perhaps indicates these heads do not feel answerable to children or that pupils are not in a position to hold them to account.

Table 4.7 further highlights the contradictory responses regarding accountability to Ofsted. This section provokes the most extreme responses, with 50 headteachers feeling most accountable to Ofsted, whereas 101 respondents state they feel the least accountability to the inspection body. This suggests an anomaly as to how individual headteachers perceive Ofsted, whilst recognizing the dilemma the heads face in balancing internal, subjective demands, alongside more objective external measures.

Such contrasting responses are difficult to clarify, which supports Cohen *et al* (2005:129), who note that it is problematic to clear up misunderstandings in questionnaire data. Furthermore, some respondents have not completed all of the middle boxes so all ranks

do not exactly total the 253 anticipated responses. It is difficult to clarify this anomaly following receipt, which again exemplifies one of the problems with using a postal questionnaire as a research instrument.

It is notable that ten headteachers went to the trouble of drawing an additional column to indicate both to whom they are actually accountable, and secondly to whom they feel morally accountable. As one respondent says:

> I have done two lists – how I really feel because of extreme pressure and how I should feel and want to feel! (524/B/G/PG/NT/5)

Another headteacher makes the pertinent comment:

> I have completed two lists, for those I am held to account by and those that I am accountable to in my own view. (500/B/G/CB/NT/21)

This evidence indicates the commitment heads show alongside their moral accountability, although the conflict faced in trying to balance personal beliefs with external performativity measures is notable. 35 respondents write that they find it problematic to answer the question and have provided written comments, even though space was not specifically allocated. These comments include:

> Difficult exercise!! I had not thought about it before! (579/B/S/NA/TH/2)

> I'm sorry – I've tried really hard but just can't rank the groups.....it's an excellent question!! (408/F/G/CE/NT/18)

These responses suggest that the implications of accountability prove particularly emotive and challenging for some headteachers, and further indicates that the design of the question was demanding.

The link between headteachers' responses to Question 21 and their school's inspection outcome is also explored to investigate if respondents' moral accountability may affect the effectiveness of their schools, according to Ofsted's criteria. Some variation is noted, with 52 per cent of heads in outstanding schools feeling most accountable to their pupils, whilst only 14 per cent have the greatest accountability to Ofsted. In contrast, 35 per cent of heads in satisfactory schools state they feel most accountable to pupils, whereas 26 per cent are most answerable to Ofsted. A possible explanation could be that heads in less successful schools are under greater pressure to improve so Ofsted is considered uppermost. Conversely, it could be that headteachers of outstanding schools concentrate their efforts on improving provision for the pupils' benefit, rather than worrying about external influences, which leads

to greater effectiveness and it is this difference which helps make their schools' outstanding. This stance is exemplified by a questionnaire comment from an outstanding headteacher:

> Headteachers are the one person accountable for a school's performance, if we have Ofsted or not. (527/A/O/PG/TH/19)

It is thus apparent the opinions that individual headteachers hold with respect to Ofsted will differ, as do the approaches taken to fulfil the multiple accountabilities inherent to the role of headship.

Heads' autonomy in fulfilling accountability expectations

The data shows that the attitudes of each headteacher will influence their perceptions of accountability and to whom they feel most answerable, which may affect their whole approach to the role. For instance, Isobel plainly feels most accountable to Ofsted, albeit she feels dissatisfied with this situation:

> It's always there. I find if ever you go on courses or if ever any initiative is brought in, if people start grumbling then the people running the course will say 'Ofsted require', or 'when they come in, this is what they're going to be looking for', which is like a threat. I find that unacceptable sometimes, I really do. (I5)

This fits with Perryman's (2009:616) Panoptic metaphor, with Ofsted perceived as an Orwellian (1949) 'Big Brother' character, checking that schools comply with performativity expectations.

Jack describes his perceptions of coping with varying accountability demands and compares these with his compliance with inspection expectations:

> I read that schools had to deal with something like 48 different new initiatives last year, either from the local authority, government or whoever. That's more than one each school week. It's my job to sort the wheat from the chaff and decide which of these will do our school some good. It's different if it's Ofsted and you have no choice but sometimes you do have a choice. (I1)

Notably, this head introduces the issue of leading and managing regular changes of expectations to external accountabilities, which may prove demanding for heads to effect. It is evident that Jack feels that he can exercise some autonomy in his role, although he further acknowledges a contrasting approach to his leadership when there is a statutory directive which schools have no choice but to conform with, such as NRwS. This view is echoed by Adam, who discusses the many levels of accountability he experiences, from parents, staff and the local authority, but leaves no doubt to whom he feels most accountable:

> We're all standing in this line watching somebody's back, and who's at the end of it? Who is that person at the end of it? For me, it's Ofsted. (I2)

The power that Ofsted wields is palpable in this quotation. Joe, a new head, describes the balance he is aiming to establish between his autonomy and the accountability inherent in his role:

> There are limitations on what you can do, if I wanted to do *x* for example, go and do *x*, and I devoted staff time to it, school resources, I'd really have to be able to justify that. (I10)

This illustrates a pragmatic approach to satisfying multiple accountabilities, although implicit is that Joe's justification could be to either external or internal stakeholders. Others take a similarly realistic approach, whilst acknowledging the pressures of headship they have developed their own strategies:

> I have made myself have a structure to my work/life balance and I do NOT work on weekends! (608/B/G/TG/TH/12)

This head has plainly assumed some autonomy, although is arguably more concerned about short-term gains and coping strategies. Another remark is:

> I don't really value Ofsted so I don't worry too much about it. (454/A/O/NA/TH/30)

This comment is actually from one of the most long-serving participants, having been a headteacher for 30 years. Her length of service, with presumably an impending retirement, may suggest she has become resigned to the system and feels little threat. However, the fact that her school received an outstanding inspection outcome indicates the respondent's confident, agential approach may have had as much impact as her experience.

A head's personal beliefs and attitudes to inspection will further influence the decisions made, and both approaches are illustrated during interview. For instance, Lucy says:

> I don't do anything because of Ofsted, nothing, I do it because it's good practice. (I4)

This approach differs markedly from Sara:

> Everything that we do is geared up towards Ofsted. (I6)

These participants are in very different schools which had received contrasting inspection outcomes, but it would appear their individual approaches, together with the extent of agency they show, may help to influence both inspection and their wider school leadership.

Other respondents show more concern about the accountability of their entire role, for instance a headteacher of 28 years' standing, comments:

> This has always been part of the job, albeit it has sharper edges and goes in deeper now! (727/A/O/CE/TH/28)

The metaphor of accountability as a knife could imply the harsh implications of not performing satisfactorily, and again the all-encompassing nature of the role is apparent.

Beth, at interview, has an interesting take on Ofsted's contribution to a headteacher's accountability. She is positive about the inspection process validating her approach:

> It was helpful at the time really, because as a head who do you get your back-up from in terms of going to people like the governors or even the teachers sometimes? In terms of them not thinking, 'oh it's just Beth having one of her bees in her bonnet', but when Ofsted actually put on paper that governors are satisfactory and they need to do x, y or z, then you can work with them and actually say this is what you need to do, so yes, Ofsted was very helpful from that point of view. (I8)

This comment highlights the isolation some heads may feel in balancing the demands of both internal and external stakeholders. Ofsted is perceived as beneficial by Beth and she almost uses their

bureaucratic accountability as a form of warning to help introduce improvements. Mary feels there are many levels of accountability, although she voices concerns about the inspection process:

> I find it quite stressful, because obviously you're accountable to the parents, you're accountable to prospective parents, you're accountable to your governors, you're accountable to the local authority, you're accountable to Ofsted....I just don't think it's a level playing field for all schools, I object to being measured against middle class white children....I don't feel Ofsted recognise that. (I3)

All four of Reder's (2005:2) models of accountability are evident in this response, which illustrates the varying expectations of different stakeholders. The objectivity implicit to reaching performative judgements is brought into question, and will always be difficult to achieve due to the uniqueness of each school setting. This supports Ball's (2003:217) argument that "the technology of performativity appears as misleadingly objective", because many factors will interplay to influence a school's effectiveness, which may further impact personally on individual headteachers.

The personal cost of accountability

81 per cent of questionnaire respondents state they are personally affected by their general accountability, whereas 72 per cent are

particularly concerned about inspection specifically. This substantial proportion is noteworthy, with many respondents mentioning concerns about their health due to pressures of the role, including anxiety or even treatment for clinical depression. For instance, one head comments:

> It's hard sometimes not to feel as if you are standing in the dock. (499/A/G/TG/TH/5)

And another:

> It makes me paranoid.....I need to be an enforcer not a headteacher! (618/C/S/NA/TH/11)

The second remark illustrates the personal strain on this head, and how she perceives compliance with bureaucratic and professional accountability measures as conflicting with her own values and headship priorities, which is likely to cause tension.

Others make detailed comments about the impact on their work-life balance. A number of individuals describe negative aspects, such as de-motivation, anxiety and feelings of isolation due to the pressures of headship, but particularly because of the Ofsted process. Over half of respondents appear quite realistic in their comments:

> It can be rewarding, it can weigh heavily. (446/A/G/CB/ TH/24)

> It can produce huge waves of stress and restlessness (at night) with poor work-life balance. Nevertheless, it is rewarding and challenging in an exciting way! (261/B/S/CB/NT/8)

These typical responses highlight both negative and positive aspects which a head must balance to fulfil the role. Some headteachers relate their concerns specifically to the inspection process:

> Everyone gets stressed at The O Word. I find I measure my career by how many more Ofsteds I can face! (722/E/O/NA/NT/13)

> You sometimes feel you are personally responsible, when a school goes into special measures the head leaves but often no-one else does! (281/B/G/CE/TH/7)

> It's very stressful knowing that if you don't know the answers you could fail your school and possibly lose your job. (27/C/S/PG/NT/2)

The high expectations on one person are evident in these responses and invite comparisons to the 'Football Manager Syndrome' discussed in Chapter 2. Interviewees also highlight the pressure of inspection, for instance, Mary says:

> On an emotional level it [Ofsted] fills me with fear, dread and horror. (I3)

Another comment from Clare was:

> Ultimate responsibility is mine and, therefore, is huge – however, identifying school's strengths and weaknesses, and planning for improvement is a positive feeling if you are able to improve things. (670/D/S/T/NT/13)

This second quotation indicates the pressure heads feel they are under, but also provides a sense of optimism and empowerment which is evident in over half of the responses, and implies the commitment and enthusiasm that many heads experience alongside more negative aspects. One questionnaire respondent sums this up:

> The headteacher role can be very stressful at times, yet is so rewarding. (675/C/S/PG/NT/13)

His more buoyant, albeit contradictory, attitude illustrates Thomson's (2009:133) observation that headteacher's can experience stress and satisfaction at the same time.

Isobel recognises that heads will be held to account, although feels the system has become too prescriptive:

> I'm all for being accountable, don't get me wrong, I think we should be accountable but I think, in a sense, there's an over-emphasis on accountability at the moment, which I think puts unnecessary stress on heads and on staff....it's the head that carries the can and often in Ofsted reports the head is mentioned, and I don't think there's any other profession where everything is quite so in the public domain. (I5)

The pressure resulting from the threat of the public 'naming and shaming' of a school or its head is mentioned by many respondents, which corresponds with the 'blame culture' identified by Avis (2003:324). For instance, Clare says:

> I know of a head who dreaded Ofsted, I think he worried he'd be found failing. So he moved jobs the year he was due, stayed there three years and then got another job in a school which had just been inspected, to stay one step ahead. I then heard he went to Wales because they didn't have Ofsted! (I7)

Anecdotes such as this will not help promote a positive view of the inspection process, and may or may not be accurate. Beth, who is due to take early retirement shortly after the interview, comments:

> I think one of the big reasons I'm leaving is because of accountability instances, if I'm honest, because I still love doing the job, I still love running a school....being with the children....but I feel that being accountable to Ofsted inspectors, SIPs, even the newspapers, all those people that are coming in and judging me, by things that in some ways I feel are out of my control, is unacceptable. (I8)

Beth is clearly concerned that her professional reputation is potentially in jeopardy due to the threat of being 'named and shamed'. It is apparent that Beth considers her day-to-day role with its intrinsic moral accountability as quite distinct from performance-based accountability measures, which she perceives as an intrusion to running her school. Far more worryingly, Adrian says:

> It frightens me, I'm very fearful of it....I actually think sometimes that it could kill me....it's a feeling of inadequacy that I actually often don't know what to do. (I9)

It is apparent from Adrian's comments that an individual's personality will possibly influence how the bureaucratic and professional accountability of inspection are approached. His attitude is in stark contrast to Lucy:

> I don't do anything because of Ofsted, nothing, I do it because it's good practice, whether Ofsted were coming or not I would do it anyway and if I do it I don't care if Ofsted don't like it, I do it because it's what I think we should be doing. (I4)

It is notable that Lucy is the only interviewee whose school achieved an outstanding outcome at the 2006 inspection. It could be argued that her confident stance is due to having received such affirmation, or conversely, that her leadership style and absolute belief in her school and its practices helped engender the highest Ofsted grading. This approach fits Thomson's (2009:58) recognition of the characteristics of charismatic leaders. Paradoxically, Lucy talks confidently about disregarding Ofsted, although she also voices concerns that her school's status is maintained at the next inspection:

> Well, the pressure is huge, I mean huge, and in fact I've said to everybody, you know there is no way, no way in a million years that we can't get outstanding this time. (I5)

This acknowledgement is quite enlightening and suggests this particular headteacher is more constrained by the demands of inspection than she perhaps realises herself. Implicit is the inherent pressure for a head to conform with performativity measures and undertake effective internal evaluations, either to improve an Ofsted grading or to maintain outstanding status.

EVALUATION

Balancing internal and external evaluations

Questionnaire respondents distinguish between internal and external evaluations and discuss the tensions between these differing expectations. One head comments:

> The pressure is to perform at your best for both my own evaluations and to keep Ofsted happy, while dealing with the plethora of 'details' of running a school. (446/A/G/CB/TH/24)

Here the respondent appears to consider internal evaluation as part of his leadership role, in contrast to more managerial aspects of the job. This may suggest self-evaluation is afforded higher status by this head, but he finds it problematic to balance these requirements with his day-to-day role. The data suggests that some headteachers

have more confidence in their own evaluations than others may do. For instance, one head of a large school comments:

> I definitely work better as a head as I decided a long time ago I was going to stop worrying about Ofsted and do what I think our children and school need. (422/E/G/PG/NT/10)

Evidently, this respondent's moral accountability is paramount, although a headteacher who had only been in post for two months at the time of the survey, has a different outlook:

> As a new head I am filled with anxiety that Ofsted will find out that I don't know what I'm doing! (309/C/G/CB/NT/<1)

However, Joe who is also new to the role and appointed after the 2006 inspection, describes a more confident and pragmatic approach to accomplishing evaluations:

> I haven't been Ofsteded yet but the last inspection did give a good picture of where the school was, so in a sense it was a good tool to help me with self-evaluation... as a new head it has made me focus on making sure that the basics are in place. (I10)

It is clear that Joe is not fazed by undertaking internal evaluation, albeit he is talking prior to experiencing an inspection as head. Confidence in his own abilities is evident, although it would be interesting to see if his perspective may change over time.

Mary describes the conflicts she experiences between her internal evaluation processes and those from outside:

> I find it quite stressful, because obviously they all want a different strand, and you have to see it from all of their angles. You're looking at pupils, parents want to know at that basic level what you are doing about behaviour and a lot of minor stuff, as well as the whole academic achievement umbrella. You're working with your governors, you're working with the Local Authority, you're answerable to Ofsted, but they all want a different piece of the picture. (I3)

Mary's response suggests that a headteacher's perception of what constitutes an effective school may be at variance to the views of other stakeholders, and again indicates an inherent subjectivity in trying to satisfy objective measures. It is further apparent that it is the headteacher's responsibility to formulate useful internal evaluations to inform the external. From this perspective, self-evaluation becomes a type of self-inspection, as identified by MacBeath (2006a:57) and Bubb *et al* (2007:35). Isobel sums up this balance quite realistically:

> If I'm talking with a proper head's hat on, Ofsted means a very good opportunity to look at the school objectively and really evaluate what it is that we do. If I'm talking as a busy head *(laughter)*, it's something quite *(sigh)*, it's not threatening but it's always there in the background and it puts an added pressure on the work that we're doing. (I5)

Isobel's reference to the ubiquitous nature of inspection leads to an exploration of the particular demands of the external evaluation undertaken by Ofsted.

External evaluation

Questionnaire respondents almost all consider Ofsted inspections to be the main external form of evaluation, with only three per cent of those surveyed commenting on other external bodies. A typical response is:

> The Ofsted report is used as a 'measuring stick' by everybody (the local authority, the community, the parents) for the school's reputation. The report can make or break a school. (694/B/G/PG/NT/9)

This implies the high stakes that inspection has for schools and their headteachers, and indicates that Ofsted is considered to be the ultimate authority. Adam gives a positive slant to the impact of his school's inspection:

> Although I worried about it beforehand, I actually found Ofsted was a really positive experience, funnily enough. We got a good outcome and this gave me the confidence to think I am doing it right, I knew I could do it, and then I've carried on in the same vein since, which seems to be working. (I2)

It is noteworthy here that it was the inspection itself which led to Adam's increased self-assurance, which supports MacBeath's (2008:390) study where some headteachers find the inspection process to be an opportunity rather than a threat. In contrast, Sara provides a more negative perspective:

> I can see there needs to be inspection, not saying I love it, but because we work with public money and the future of our nation is in our hands so to speak, there must be some sort of inspection regime. But I don't think being inspected improves my school – if anything it drains us afterwards. I believe the commitment of my staff and me improves our school, but would we do that without Ofsted, I guess that is the question. *(Laughter)* (I6)

It is evident that Sara does not necessarily agree with the purposes of inspection and feels there are many negative implications. However, implicit to her response is the agency she demonstrates by acknowledging and accepting inspection, albeit she appears not to agree with the process. It is perceivable that this tacit approval may arguably help deliver a positive inspection outcome.

There is limited mention of other external evaluation, for example, one respondent questions the worth of the Department for Education's national Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through school Self-Evaluation (RAISE) data:

> RAISE assessment data is not useful for my evaluations, all it does is give the 'powers that be' more fuel to make sweeping judgements. (325/B/S/PG/NT/4)

Clearly, this type of evaluation is perceived by this head to be part of bureaucratic procedures, feeding into formal performativity measures. This view is confirmed by another response:

> Central data and statistics held by government agencies cloud what actually goes on and what we value. (692/A/S/TG/TH/7)

This comment is especially notable because this head has a 20 hour weekly teaching commitment, so little opportunity for specific internal evaluation at a strategic level. It could, however, be argued that she is particularly well informed on subjective aspects, due to the large proportion of time spent in a teaching role. Taking Ball's (2003:219) standpoint, it is likely headteachers who are expected to teach for a considerable proportion of their time may experience a particular dilemma in balancing their subjectivity with "management panopticism". Furthermore, these heads will have to take an objective stance to evaluate their own teaching, alongside that of their colleagues.

Another participant writes of the value of other external evaluations, such as Investors in People accreditation:

> Going through the Investors in People measures, the Basic Skills Award, Sportsmark and the Healthy Schools Award gave a purpose and structure for me to find out what's happening. (390/E/G/PG/NT/8)

This headteacher evidently embraces additional external appraisals and finds them helpful for developing her school. It is perceivable these are highly valued due to the participant having initiated the evaluation, which suggests she has adopted a proactive, agential approach and uses external accreditation to endorse her work.

A performativity culture

It is apparent throughout interviews that inspection heavily influences the role of the primary headteacher. Although other stakeholders are discussed, it is notable that Ofsted is considered the ultimate power, and all interviewees mention the inspection body at length. A typical response is from Isobel:

> I mean everything I do is geared up towards (pause)...in the back of my mind always it's there, you know. What are we doing, what does this mean in terms of how Ofsted will judge us? (I5)

Isobel's remark implies that a culture of performativity is well embedded in her school and she has become used to preparing the staff and pupils to almost perform for inspection, whilst she takes the

self-inspector role as described by MacBeath (2006a:57). Adam demonstrates confidence in his evaluations, but questions the necessity for such performativity measures:

> Ofsted make us check up that we're focusing on the right things and moving in the right direction, but if I'm honest I would still do that if we didn't have Ofsted, because that's what I need to do to make sure my school is effective. (I2)

Similarly to Lucy's stance (see page 210), Adam clearly has belief in his abilities, albeit the measures and conditions he is implementing to make his school effective could arguably have been influenced by the culture of performativity which has pervaded since he came to the role. However, because Adam is performing his role as expected by internal and external stakeholders, demonstrating his agency in complying with the system, then it is likely that he is afforded some trust and the autonomy to continue. This supports Robinson's (2011:76) identification of heads gaining some "earned autonomy", albeit within the constraints of bureaucratic and professional accountabilities. Her understanding is important to the study and suggests that those headteachers who play the inspection game by the rules will achieve the best outcomes. This is arguably Ofsted's underlying intention to the inspection process and could, in the longer term, make the process redundant as predicted by MacBeath and Myers (1999:125-6). Beth aptly sums up the situation:

> It's all a game really, isn't it? We're sitting here getting ready to play, only Ofsted really know the rules, but you have to do everything you can to show your school in its best light. (I8)

In consideration of the performativity measures used to inform the external accountability of local authorities, Jack describes the problems he has encountered with a School Improvement Partner:

> I'm on my second SIP now, because the first SIP came in and it was just horrendous, it was one of the most depressing meetings I have ever had, it was horrendous. It wasn't the process, it was the way the process was carried out by the person, and I complained....I took it to regional level and they replaced the SIP. (I1)

His experience suggests that although the process of external evaluation is intended to be objective, inevitably there will always be some subjectivity due to the personalities involved. Evidently, Jack is extremely disappointed by his initial SIP relationship, albeit empowered enough to challenge it, which indicates he had the freedom to exercise some autonomy. He acknowledges the situation has greatly improved since:

> The new SIP has been very, very good, very challenging as the SIP's got to be, but again he's willing to take context and he's willing to take where we are and what we're looking to do in that wider band and that's been quite productive, but again is that down to personality or is that down to the system? (I1)

It is notable that Jack accepted his school should be appraised by an external authority, but deemed the initial approach as inappropriate. Thus, the process is not in question but how it was undertaken by an individual SIP. Lucy also recognises the function of external evaluation and appreciates its merits:

> There are lots and lots of schools that are not doing fine and actually, if somebody wasn't inspecting them and somebody wasn't seeing what was going on....you know. I can see how government have got to say we need to see what's going on in these schools. (I4)

In contrast, Adrian gives a negative opinion of inspection:

> Some person walks into my school and seems to know more about it than I do, that's how it feels. (I9)

Here, the tension between internal and external evaluation is perceptible. Clearly, Adrian feels quite vulnerable to the objectivity and performance measures of external appraisal, and places greater value on his own internal evaluations.

Internal evaluation

The expectations for internal evaluations have become more formalized since NRwS, and although such appraisals were probably carried out beforehand these were not shared explicitly with external

parties. It is notable that 71 per cent of questionnaire respondents feel their self-evaluation practices have changed appreciably since NRwS. Beth sums up this shift during interview:

> We always have done our own evaluations, looking at teaching and learning, and seeing what we could do to improve. I guess having a requirement to self-evaluate for Ofsted has changed things, it's more prescribed but it's not actually reinventing the wheel. (I8)

This acknowledgement from a long-serving head suggests the process of self-evaluation has always been undertaken as an integral part of the role of headteacher, but not specifically measured or formally reported. Hence, it can be argued that self-evaluation under NRwS allows the head some input into the inspection process, although conversely it could be supposed that the requirement has been introduced due to a lack of trust previously.

Analysis of questionnaire data indicates that numerous stakeholders have some input into the self-evaluation carried out by the headteacher. These may include governing bodies, senior leadership teams, teachers, other staff, parents, pupils, community groups, local authorities and dioceses. Those most involved are governors, with 160 respondents (63 per cent) acknowledging their contribution. Additionally, half of the headteachers surveyed (126 respondents)

involve colleagues in the evaluation of their schools. Interestingly, 34 per cent of respondents use pupils' opinions to inform the process, which contrasts with only 10 per cent citing the local authority or SIP as being concerned with school self-evaluation. This indicates a lessening function of local authorities in school management, which is consistent with Barzano's (2009:202) findings, or conversely that the SIP role is perceived by many heads as a predominantly external function.

A large proportion of questionnaire respondents recognise observations to be one of the most valuable types of internal evaluation. Analysis of Question 11 reveals that over 83 per cent of those who responded find informal observations around the school to be of value and 76 per cent state that lesson observations are equally useful. The least helpful tool is believed to be the government-initiated RAISE online analysis, with 32 per cent of headteachers not finding this relevant to their self-evaluations, albeit 15 per cent find it very useful. A head's autonomy in how and what they choose to evaluate is thus evident here, with the majority of heads valuing a subjective approach to tell the unique story of their school.

The questionnaire responses illustrate that as a mean average, headteachers spend 23 per cent of their working week on self-evaluation, although 52 participants report finding it impossible to quantify, with a few stating they can often spend up to 100 per cent of their time evaluating. This suggests that headteachers have quite varying perspectives on what actually constitutes self-evaluation and that it is not a prescribed task or notion within headship. The finding also lends further weight to the understanding that heads have some autonomy in their approach, as to what they evaluate, how and when they do this, and for what purpose.

When discussing self-evaluation during interviews, general trends are again evident, for instance Jack describes how he carries out monitoring in relation to the targets he has set for his school:

> I use this sort of picture, because we talk a lot in school about picture images, and I use the image of a type of cross-head, a telescopic sight, and aim it on my vision, which is what I was appointed for. (I1)

This exemplifies the strategic, long-term approach to internal evaluation taken by Jack. Adrian compares his role to building an ark:

> I started building some huge ship, several years ago, that I'd like to see floating....I'm pretty sure if the rain comes along, I'm fairly sure it'll float, it'll

> probably float really darned well. So some days I think it will take all those animals in and will stay afloat for forty days very comfortably....And other days I just think, well we haven't got the roof on, there's not even a ramp to get the animals up *(laughter)*, there's no floor to it yet, even though we've got some nice looking walls and actually it's bound to sink. (I9)

Although Adrian is using humour, alongside a biblical metaphor, to describe his approach to leading and evaluating his school, he is very sincere in depicting the highs and lows of the head's strategic role. In contrast to Jack, he becomes anxious when he perceives a problem, and perhaps gets rather more caught up in the minutiae of evaluation, rather than remaining confident to his long-term vision. It is interesting to note that Adrian is a teaching head in a small school, whereas Jack has a non-teaching role in a larger school. This observation may help to explain their differing approaches, as Adrian probably has more of his time taken up with low-level management or teaching expectations, as he has few others to delegate such issues to, whereas Jack perhaps has a greater proportion of his time to spend on strategic, leadership functions. Nonetheless, it is recognised that an individual headteacher's personality and style of leadership will impact on their approach to evaluation. One noteworthy comment from the survey is:

> We find self-evaluation easy – it's capturing it on official forms that's the problem.
> (656/C/G/ TG/NT1/15)

This head evidently fulfils the wider expectations of internal evaluations but emphasizes the specific demands of the SEF.

The SEF

As the SEF formally sought the opinions of headteachers prior to inspection for the first time it could be perceived as a constructive aspect of the New Relationship, although the majority of written comments from questionnaire respondents are negative as to its value. 57 per cent of those who comment find the form problematic to complete, whilst only three participants (1 per cent) find it a positive or useful task. A typical example from a recently appointed headteacher is:

> I find it quite stressful and, to be honest, am terrified of getting it wrong." (424/A/S/CE/NT/1)

Almost all (97 per cent) questionnaire respondents state they personally complete Ofsted's self-evaluation form. 99 per cent of these heads involve other stakeholders in the process, but all state that it is their personal responsibility to complete the document. One headteacher remarks:

> Governors are supposed to have their 'fingerprints' all over the SEF but in reality they don't know enough to write any of it! (602/D/O/PG/NT/6)

This implies that the SEF requirement of NRwS has impacted considerably on the headteachers' workload. One respondent describes the personal pressure felt in order to write an effective SEF:

> I think self-evaluation is a step in the right direction, although you put your soul on the line in your SEF – it's there in black and white. (301/B/G/CB/NT/23)

This epitomizes the tone of many comments and implies the strain that heads feel in endeavouring to make the document accurate. One participant is quite angry about the external support he received:

> The SIP advised me on what to put and this was then 'rubbished' by the inspector – and the SIP agreed with him! (324/B/G/CE/TH/12)

This comment indicates the seemingly contradictory guidance that headteachers have received regarding completion of the SEF, which supports MacBeath's (2006a:109) findings, and suggests that writing the SEF is one aspect of the head's role for which there is no specific right or wrong answer. It is interesting to note that the SEF has also influenced a shifting liaison between the SIP and headteachers, as the local authority is likely to have sight of the SEF and will use it to help gauge a head's capabilities. In previous frameworks, local authority

representatives had more of an advisory role, rather than holding headteachers to account. Furthermore, it implies that the New Relationship between heads and inspectors continues to have flaws, and has perhaps been hampered by the introduction of this additional document.

A head's autonomy in completion of the SEF is apparent, albeit the implications of submitting a weak SEF are considerable. A head of a school judged good by Ofsted, with 15 years in post, states:

> This is the one thing that will make me leave headship early. (745/C/G/NA/TH/15)

Whilst another comments:

> I hate it! I don't update it frequently enough so it becomes a HUGE hurdle for me. (539/C/O/TG/NT/8)

This respondent has been in post for eight years and is head of a school judged outstanding, which suggests he is a competent author although the requirement has evidently placed additional pressure on his workload. A long-standing headteacher, of another outstanding school, notes:

> As it is not statutory to have it 'live' it is not the top of my priority list. I teach children, not paper. (527/A/O/PG/TH/19)

Again here, this head's sense of agency and moral accountability has taken precedence over bureaucratic expectations, which may indicate that prioritising the children as her main concern helps make her an outstanding head. Moreover, such comments from successful heads suggest that SEF requirements do not have to be embraced wholeheartedly to achieve the highest outcome.

During interviews, the SEF is again mentioned frequently, which suggests the significance that headteachers place on the document. A typical comment from Adam is:

> The SEF is vital in the whole process, it is Ofsted's window on my school. We ignore it at our peril. (I2)

This stance indicates Adam's acknowledgement of the necessity to satisfy performativity measures, which suggests he is confident in his role but has resigned himself to working within the current system. However, taking Fisher's (2011:52) perspective, Adam's positive approach could arguably indicate an underlying insecurity in either his school's effectiveness or his own abilities, which has constrained him to place the SEF uppermost in his internal systems. Other heads are quite negative about the logistics of its completion. For example, Lucy comments:

> The SEF is a nightmare to me, a complete nightmare, I hate it with a passion. (I4)

Although Lucy feels antipathy to completion of the SEF, at the same time she clearly recognises its importance to the inspection process:

> Our inspection was fair and there wasn't a lot they had to look for, but you see that's where the SEF comes in. You know if your SEF doesn't say what they want it to say, you're scuppered. I've had training on the SEF, you know, and it still goes on for reams of pages because I feel they should know....and obviously it was a pretty good SEF because they obviously thought that what we said was justified. 'Cos you could write whatever you like, couldn't you *(laughter)*? (I4)

Lucy, another outstanding headteacher, perhaps gives more credence to the SEF than some heads, which similarly to Adam suggests she has embraced the system, exercising her agency, even though she personally dislikes the task. However, the fact that she has taken considerable time writing her SEF, and been proactive as to its content, must have helped in some part to her school being awarded an outstanding grade for leadership and management. Furthermore, Lucy's acknowledgement that her SEF was well received by inspectors would have enhanced her credibility and may have made her more inclined to work towards a positive professional relationship. Another aspect of the virtuous circle is thus apparent.

Sara's awareness of the SEF writing process is perhaps quite shrewd:

> Somebody said to me you want to read an Ofsted report first, and write your SEF like the Ofsted report, so they can copy it, sort of thing. So that's what I've done and they seemed to like it. (I6)

Again, it is perceptible this head has taken quite a strategic, positive approach, by investigating what is required and delivering it. Her focus on outcomes is clear, so rather than using it as a self-evaluation tool, the SEF is seen as a task to complete to satisfy inspectors. Therefore, it is evident that external evaluations may drive, to some extent, internal processes and almost lead to a system of self-inspection, as identified by MacBeath (2006a:57).

Mary has quite contrasting experiences of evidencing her self-evaluation. Her school had received a satisfactory grade, and during interview she reflects on the SEF's importance:

> I've had three inspections, the first two on the long inspections; they did me more favours than the short one. Now I blame myself because it was probably down to the SEF, but what is a good SEF? I don't know, I've never seen anybody else's SEF. You know, one person says it's too long, one person says you haven't gone into enough detail, you've skipped over that. (I3)

Mary certainly feels that her interpretation of the SEF writing process has let her school down. Although it would be far too simplistic to

suggest the quality of a SEF will determine the inspection outcome for a school, it is clearly a key document within the process.

Finally, data concerning heads' perceptions of the inspection process and the effect it has on primary headship will be considered, in order to explore the relationship between the main concepts.

IMPLICATIONS OF NRwS FOR HEADTEACHERS

Heads' perceptions of inspection

Table 4.5 (page 201) indicates that 83 per cent of the total questionnaire respondents feel that changes made to inspection under NRwS are either better or about the same as the previous system, which is a considerable endorsement and suggests the heads surveyed generally perceive the reforms to be worthwhile. Positive comments (from 18 per cent of respondents) centre on heads feeling better prepared, or more in control, due to self-evaluation. The reliance on data from national testing is highlighted as a negative aspect of inspection for 21 per cent of respondents. The continuing influence of performativity is noteworthy, which suggests the fundamental culture has not changed under NRwS. For instance, one respondent remarks:

> The process is better but heavy reliance on external data is problematic. (663/B/S/CE/NT/8)

It is thus evident this head believes measuring outcomes of performance will take precedence over less quantifiable evidence. Another head writes:

> Our inspection was too short and totally data driven. They took no notice of all the fabulous stuff we do. Initial outcome was 'inadequate' but we appealed and HMI overturned the Ofsted judgement....made me want to resign! First time in 20 year career that I did not want to come to school. (320/B/S/TG/NT/5)

Here, the subjective, internal aspects of school-life are seemingly valued less than examination results. Furthermore, a minority of participants (6 per cent) feel the inspection was too short, so inspectors did not obtain a comprehensive overview of their school. A typical comment is:

> I felt the inspector didn't know the school when she left, there wasn't time. It seems to rely heavily on the blagging ability of the headteacher!
> (609/B /S/TG/NT/16)

The importance of the headteacher to the process is implicit here, with the mention of 'blagging' suggesting that each individual head's approach, including putting a positive 'spin' on their school's situation, can help influence an inspection to some extent. Furthermore, it supports Fisher's (2011:53) notion that inspection has

elements of inauthenticity and schools may put on a performance to meet expectations. This implies that if the process perhaps included a monitoring role between visits, carried out by the same inspectors, it may prove beneficial to all parties. This idea is alluded to by Sara during interview:

> Although we had a good inspection, they fly in and fly out again, I just wish the same chap would come back and I could show him what I've done since he came. We've moved a mile. (I6)

Although this head wants regular scheduled visits, 73 heads (29 per cent) prefer receiving less notice of inspection, so there is less opportunity to prepare or become stressed during the build-up. A typical comment is:

> Better to have less time as it gives a truer picture – no time to cover things up! (710/A/O/CB/TH/4)

However, contrasting viewpoints are apparent:

> I find short notice very stressful. You used to worry for six weeks, now you worry for four years! (650/A/O/TG/TH/2)

This head clearly feels less control over the process, with the threat of inspection being omnipresent. This is consistent with Perryman's (2009:616) Panopticon metaphor, with the respondent believing her school needs to be constantly prepared for inspection.

The Panoptic effect

Interviewees discuss the short notice period for inspection under NRwS and how this can influence the head's day-to-day role. For instance, Jack, head of a school which had been through a lot of changes and is rapidly improving, remarks:

> I think with the shortened timescale you are always aware of it, and I think every time we are doing something, or changing something, or developing something I'm always aware that I need to show impact of it to Ofsted. (I1)

Sara gives a similar viewpoint:

> Everything that we do is geared up towards Ofsted, in the back of my mind always it's there, you know, what are we doing, what does this mean in terms of how Ofsted will judge us? (I6)

Such comments suggest these heads are constantly mindful of how their schools may be judged by Ofsted, with this state of preparedness influencing their role, which supports the Panoptic metaphor. This implies that headteachers perceive the inspection process as far more than merely a three, four or five yearly spot check on a school, and the system of self-evaluation may leave heads in an almost perpetual state of anticipation, or even dread, that their school will be found lacking in some respect. Adam discusses this aspect of NRwS:

> I think it was good to have shorter notice, saved a lot of worry, but Ofsted is always there in the background. You know your inspection will be in three years and you have to prepare for that, but they might be changing this again, I've heard. To be honest, I would really prefer them just to walk in and take us as they find us. I honestly think that is the only way for them to really find out what's going on in schools. (I2)

Here it is apparent that Adam has considered the process of inspection in some depth and acknowledges the regular changes of expectation that heads have to meet. He perceives the short notice period to be something of a false notion, as schools are aware their next visit is likely to fall into a certain academic year. Other heads question the very purpose of inspection.

The purpose of school inspection

The purpose of having a school inspection process is referred to by almost all respondents. The vast majority of heads queried whether inspection is of any benefit to individual schools, and believe that it does not help to raise standards, but rather is used to provide a national picture to inform the government. Pertinent remarks include:

> My school is showing rapid improvement but that's because of the hard work of all my team, not because we had an inspection. (499/A/G/TG/TH/5)

> I don't believe inspection helps to improve my school, or helps us to get better results. We are just a very little cog in their big political wheel. (325/B/S/PG/NT/4)

Clare, who has been headteacher of four schools, shows a quite considered approach to the purpose and benefits of inspection:

> I think Ofsted to me is a tool by which these people who need to know about the school can gain an overview done by professionals....my approach has always been to show these people what we do and how we work.....so they can put it down, but also so that we can gain some information from them and hopefully move our practice forward as well. (I7)

Here, Clare makes a distinct link to inspection being used to improve her school. It arguably takes a headteacher with a strong sense of agency, who is confident of his or her own abilities, to adopt this approach. Lucy, whose school is successful, has a slightly different viewpoint:

> Ofsted's a body, I think, that had to be set up for schools that were not doing as well as they could do. I think for schools that are doing well it's just a bit of a hindrance really....but there are lots and lots of schools that aren't doing fine...so I can see why you've got to have Ofsted but as a headteacher I think it's a complete pain in the behind, and I don't think it benefits the school one jot, before or after. (I4)

Lucy evidently perceives Ofsted to be of little value to her school, although her acknowledgement that external evaluation is likely to

improve performance in some schools emphasizes that she considers inspection has a purpose. Mary also discusses Ofsted's effect on schools, moving on to a debate about the accountability of schools within wider society:

> You can have autonomy and accountability, I think it comes down to one word and that's trust. But I don't think we're trusted by Ofsted. I don't think we're trusted. And I do worry about our public image, it's the usual thing about whatever happens in society, it's always the schools' doing. Either schools are going to solve it or they have created it. It's one or the other. (I3)

It is apparent that Mary feels the implications of Ofsted to be considerable for the headteacher, but that satisfying a culture of performativity is just one element of the head's wider role and responsibilities. The mention of trust is of note, as it is perceptible that if there were more trust in schools and their personnel, from all stakeholders, then there may be less necessity for external accountability measures.

Many respondents describe the pressure on themselves personally and the isolation intrinsic to the role of primary headteacher.

The isolation of heads

Overall, 181 (72 per cent) of questionnaire respondents feel their responsibilities within the inspection process affect them on a personal level, which is a considerable majority. There are many emotive comments, with over 65 per cent of respondents reporting stress or anxiety with respect to the process. 37 heads remark that they find it difficult to establish a suitable work-life balance due to the demands of their workload. An additional seven headteachers state they have regular insomnia due to their fears and 88 report feeling isolated due to the expectations of NRwS, with little internal or external support.

During interviews it is apparent that almost all participants perceive their role to be a lonely one, and feel there are very few people to routinely discuss ideas with or receive support from. This is an issue that perhaps proves easier to voice during conversation with a fellow practitioner and with time for reflection. For instance, Isobel, who leads a very small school, feels the bulk of SEF writing is her sole responsibility:

> I've always tried very hard to share it [the SEF] with governors....I don't mean they writing it but just so there's an awareness among them...I had one chair who was pretty, I don't know, hopeless I suppose....I just felt that I could have written any old thing and he'd have signed it....so I actively sought out more

> accountability from my governors, just from the point of view that actually it shouldn't all be on my shoulders. (I5)

Clare has a similar view:

> You are aware that when Ofsted comes it is actually you that is taking that front line, and you've got to get it right for the sake of everybody else, the whole team. If you don't get it right, well you're letting them down, and that I think does weigh heavily. (I7)

These comments suggest changes brought under NRwS have had a particular impact on the role of the primary headteacher, because there is less focus on teaching and greater attention given to internal evaluations undertaken by the head and on their perspectives during inspection.

Sara, in a big school with an extensive leadership team to undertake some of the evaluation demands, is particularly upbeat although still feels something of the isolation and personal accountability implicit to her role:

> I accept that's the job that you're in, it's not for the faint-hearted though....I've told my staff there's only one name on that report, and it's my name. (I6)

This remark implies that heads will encourage delegation if they have the opportunity to, but the implications of inspection for both

the school and the individual headteacher's career mean self-evaluation and SEF writing are aspects of the role which participants perceive to be their individual responsibility. However, the small number of respondents who feel positive about completing the SEF is noteworthy and suggests the responsibility of carrying out such high stakes self-evaluation could weigh heavily.

Only seven questionnaire respondents (3 per cent) enjoy the increased autonomy they have to carry out self-evaluation under NRwS, with one of these describing a greater sense of empowerment:

> I like it – feel I'm not being done to anymore. (656/C/G/ TG/NT/15)

Another respondent also stressed the positive benefits:

> A responsibility to recognise and note the many strengths of the school can be uplifting. (95/C/G/TG/NT/8)

Here it is evident these heads demonstrate agency and confidence in their abilities.

A head's agency

It is conceivable that taking a positive, optimistic approach will enable heads to show their school in the best possible light.

Furthermore, it can be argued this enthusiasm is one of the constructive elements that inspectors are looking for, either consciously or intuitively, because it will imply that a head has agency, is proactive and is confident of his or her school's effectiveness.

An important element of the headteacher's character identified in the study is the confidence he or she can show when speaking with inspectors, to give a positive impression of their school. For instance, Lucy says:

> I think that maybe some headteachers talk it [their school] up slightly better than others can.....you could have slightly at-odds data and if the headteacher can't talk that up then it will go against them, but if the headteacher can talk it up, they might still keep it on the up. Some headteachers..... can't talk the talk as well as others can talk the talk. (I4)

Sara, another very optimistic character, also alludes to this approach:

> You can't hide failures, they say just be honest about what's going on....well fair enough, but you're not going to open wounds unnecessarily are you? You're not going to say, 'go to Year 5 because they're rubbish in Year 5' *(laughter)* are you, no? And although you're honest in the SEF, you know, you're honest to a point. (I6)

These comments are consistent with Hargreaves' (1995:120) observation some years previously, that headteachers may include an "element of front" to their part of the inspection game.

In contrast, Mary shows some concern that her methods are not the most positive:

> You've got to sell yourself to Ofsted. I'm not very good at selling myself or selling my school, I have to say, and I'm very aware of that, and I do sort of say, yes that's satisfactory. (I3)

This approach implies a weaker and less constructive attitude, which may be less highly regarded by inspectors. It is further apparent here that accepting a satisfactory grade is not, ironically, going to lead to satisfaction. This may be merely semantics but the implication is that a grading of satisfactory is not considered good enough by many headteachers or other stakeholders.

From the data, it is apparent that headteachers have some choice over deciding how and to what extent they 'talk the talk', but also that their individual personalities are likely to affect their approach. Respondents were also invited to comment on the specific days of their inspections in November 2006.

Experience of the 2006 inspection

The actual days of an inspection can impact considerably on headteachers in the short term. Respondents have mixed reactions to their 2006 inspection, some are very positive:

> I felt I could discuss different aspects and amplify my answers when necessary. (694/B/G/PG/NT/9)

> It gave me confidence to say 'this is what we do and this is how it impacts on our pupils' learning and wellbeing – we believe in it!' (540/B/S/TG/NT/14)

Thus, it is apparent that the greater collegiality aimed for under NRwS has proved beneficial to some heads. Nevertheless, there are some negative comments, as typified by:

> Our inspection was awful, like a millstone, wore me out. Took me best part of a year to recover. (354/B/G/PG/TH/11)

This remark indicates that the effects of a brief visit can resonate for much longer, with the mention of a millstone implying the self-evaluation prior to inspection also weighed heavily. Many comments about the actual days of an inspection focus on the specific demands made of the headteacher at this critical time. As already highlighted, processes under NRwS mean the headteacher will receive the greatest scrutiny. 88 respondents (35 per cent) state they

found this focus particularly demanding. One headteacher of a small school responds:

> The burden on one person becomes immense. (325/B/S/PG/NT/4)

Another comments:

> It was me under the spotlight. I don't want to overburden staff so I overburdened myself. (429/D/G/CB/NT/18)

And one respondent remarks:

> Many staff now regard the inspection as an inspection of the headteacher – good for teachers as they feel under less pressure. (324/B/G/CE/TH/12)

From another perspective, however, it can mean that teaching staff may feel somewhat overlooked or even superfluous to the inspection. One head notes this aspect:

> I would say teachers and support staff felt 'cheated' as very little classroom observation was carried out. (478/B/G/CE/TH/15)

This response again highlights that the requirements of NRwS have shifted the focus from teaching activities to an emphasis on leadership and management, through data checking and school self-evaluation.

Interviewees also speak of their experiences during the inspection itself. Most are quite positive, perhaps suggesting the anticipation was worse than the actual experience. For instance, Isobel describes her visit:

> When we had our last Ofsted it was a very positive experience and we had two really nice people who came in, um I don't know, it was a good experience and we came out of it well, and they obviously came wanting us to do well. (I5)

Jack is particularly buoyant:

> I have to say that it was brilliant. I was fortunate that I had two amazing Ofsted inspectors who came in, who had read the SEF, who understood the unique circumstances we were in, we had had huge turnovers of staff, we had a very, very embryonic leadership team and they took that on board and worked with us and it was a very positive experience. (I1)

This indicates that individual inspectors can be supportive and will work to achieve the best outcome for the schools they visit. Clearly, inspectors have a role to perform, just as the head does, although it is perhaps inevitable that different personalities will influence the process, to good or bad effect. Clare feels that her last inspection was quite testing:

> It was interesting that my last inspector was a very, very challenging gentleman, that was his manner, but I'm perfectly capable of sticking to my guns

> when I really believe something and I kept saying, 'no, it's not like that'. (I7)

This remark suggests that Clare found her inspection quite difficult, albeit she had enough self-assurance at the time to stand up for her beliefs and her school, by disagreeing with the initial findings. The outcome of Clare's school's inspection was good, which confirms her approach was effective. However, she goes on to describe a very different experience for a local colleague:

> The same inspector came to another school I know, and there it was absolutely devastating because they could not cope with the very strong, and almost aggressive challenge, because he really was a bit like that, but you've just got to say, well it isn't like that. (I7)

Clare reveals that this other school had been graded as inadequate, when it had been expected to receive a satisfactory outcome, and consequently the headteacher resigned. Although this is an unconfirmed report from the interviewee, the implication is that a head's ability to defend his or her school and its achievements are fundamental to the inspection process. It is questionable whether a different inspection team may have invoked quite the same reaction, which could then have led to a different outcome. This observation leads to a brief consideration of the effects of subjectivity on the inspection process.

Subjectivity – by heads and inspectors

Analysis of the data indicates there will be an element of subjectivity in the inspection process, from both the headteacher and the inspection team. Ofsted inspectors undertake a considerable amount of training and there is a clear framework and protocol they must follow (Ofsted, 2010). However, an inspection is carried out by individual personnel and it is feasible that their approach and attitude, together with that of the host school staff, may have some influence on the process. A number of respondents stress the importance of the quality of the inspection team who visited. One comments:

> It is very much a lottery regarding the inspector and our relationship. (185/A/G/CE/TH/3)

Similarly, another head writes:

> I believe inspection really depends on the QUALITY of the TEAM sent to your school. (64/C/S/TG/NT/11)

One head shows particular concerns in relation to the inspector's own background or beliefs:

> If their personal viewpoint was different, they may not view things the same. So if they don't believe in a free-flow foundation stage, for instance, it might not be looked on kindly. (527/A/O/PG/TH/19)

As this respondent remarks, an inspector's own belief systems and personal experiences could have a subconscious effect on their decisions, or even how they interact with other personalities involved in the inspection. Furthermore, it can be argued that the approach taken and the personality of each headteacher may also impact. This subjectivity could have either a positive or negative influence. Some interviewees talk positively about the inspection team who visited their school:

> I had a fantastic inspector, very, very affable. The minute we had the conversation on the telephone I thought, 'this is going to go well'. (I6)

Whereas, Mary has had varying experiences over her career:

> I've had three inspections and I've had three very different teams. (I3)

Lucy also discusses this issue:

> If there was consistency on who you get, on what they see and what they report on, it'd be a bit better, but there isn't. It's very, very subjective and I think everybody feels that. (I2)

The inspection framework has changed over time, although comments such as this suggest the personalities involved are likely to have some influence on the system. In addition, an inspector's subjectivity, whether intentional or not, may affect both the process

and how a head will function within it. It is particularly interesting to note how interviewees speak of the inspectors who had visited their schools. This ranges from two heads referring to their respective inspectors by first names, making it plain they had built up a friendly dialogue, to a slightly derogatory reference to, "Joe Soap" (I3); and even a militaristic mention of, "Von Kapp and Von Luttwitz" (I4). This suggests that the head's autonomy, or even their subliminal attitude, over how they respond to an individual inspector, not to mention the inspector's own personality and approach, could potentially have some bearing on the outcome for a school.

It is thus apparent that a supposedly objective inspection process will have elements of subjectivity. Firstly, the head's own beliefs will have some impact, and secondly, the system will be subject to the vagaries of different personalities working within, and being required to make judgements from, an objective inspection framework.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview data indicates some emerging themes. In particular, many facets pertinent to the role of

primary headteacher within the inspection process are discussed and will be considered further in Chapter 5.

Although there are national expectations for primary heads under NRwS, such as the requirements to carry out self-evaluation and write a SEF, these will be completed in a wide variety of circumstances depending upon the size and setting of a school, length of service of the headteacher and the varying demands on his or her time.

The accountability felt, to internal and external stakeholders, weighs heavily for many heads, although there is some evidence of autonomy in approach as to how individuals manage being held to account. The importance of internal, self-evaluations are generally perceived as central to helping address the performativity measures of NRwS. Changes to the inspection framework are mostly considered a positive step towards building a professional rapport with Ofsted, albeit internal evaluations can arguably amount to a form of self-inspection by the headteacher. The additional demands placed on individual heads by the New Relationship are sometimes cited as a cause for concern. This includes the sense of isolation a headteacher can feel and the inherent pressure caused from

endeavouring to satisfy internal and external stakeholders within something of a 'blame culture'.

The data collected for the study indicates that respondents have quite contrasting experiences of inspection, both negative and positive, which help frame their opinions as to its value. There is some evidence of heads playing the inspection game, even putting on a performance to satisfy Ofsted. It is further apparent that individuals' own beliefs and personalities may influence their role and could have some impact on the inspection itself.

In Chapter 5, the themes which have emerged from the data generated will be explored in greater detail in order to address the research questions.

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CHAPTER 5

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IDENTIFYING THEMES TO ADDRESS THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

A number of themes have emerged from the relevant literature and analysis of the data generated for the study. In Chapter 5, the four main themes are discussed firstly. The research questions are then addressed with regard to these themes.

Firstly, the unique circumstances of each school setting and its headteacher are explored. The potential conflict between the autonomy and accountability in the primary headteacher's role is next identified as the key theme to emerge from the study. The extent of agency shown by heads is then highlighted with the approaches to inspection taken by different headteachers in the study being categorized into three contrasting approaches. Finally, the notion of the game analogy in the inspection process is expanded upon, including the identification of a virtuous circle.

Recognizing uniqueness

Both the interview data and questionnaire comments illustrate the genuine fondness the respondents hold for their respective schools and pupils, they want to achieve success and to really make a difference. There is little doubt that, whatever its size or circumstances, each school is unique and it is the head's responsibility to make the best of his or her particular situation.

The evidence suggests that the size of a school will influence how its headteacher will function, as the role is likely to vary depending on the extent of delegation possible and other demands on a head's time. Many questionnaire responses emphasize the challenges found in smaller schools, such as having the same amount of paperwork and bureaucracy to deal with as larger counterparts alongside possibly a teaching commitment as well. Analysis of the quantitative survey data indicates that a greater proportion of schools with fewer than 300 pupils received a good or outstanding inspection. In contrast, of the larger schools surveyed a greater proportion received a satisfactory inspection.

Comparing exam results between schools and over time should provide a fair reflection of a school and the quality of its teaching,

which underpins the performativity measures in the inspection process. This can cause particular problems when each child is relied upon to make up a considerable proportion of a school's entire performance. Ball's (2003:217) argument that "the technology of performativity appears as misleadingly objective" resounds here, due to the potential for greater variation between small cohorts.

It must also be acknowledged that heads of large primary schools are likely to have a greater quantity of issues and incidents to deal with as they have more pupils, parents and personnel, which again will result in limited time for self-evaluation. Indeed, heads from some of the largest schools surveyed argue they have the most demanding role in the inspection process because they have less personal knowledge of individual children, teachers and key stages, and the schools are perhaps sited in more challenging locations.

Some respondents actually remark that it is hard to compare the role in different settings, although ironically that is exactly what Ofsted has to do when applying the same framework in every situation. This observation is consistent with MacBeath's (2006b:17) acknowledgement that school staff must be confident to tell the unique story of their school so that it "goes beyond the mean statistics".

It appears that the amount of time a headteacher has to spend on evaluation could make a considerable difference to what they do. However, some heads may not feel that assured or proficient in objectively evaluating their school so it becomes easier to concentrate on tasks of a more managerial nature, thus having an extensive day-to-day workload could arguably become almost an excuse to not carry out thorough self-evaluations. This understanding has implications with respect to the first research question as if heads' perceptions of their role in the process can vary so profoundly then this is highly likely to affect how they prepare for inspection and their attitudes throughout.

Having responsibility for self-evaluation under NRwS is likely to bring its own demands for every head, particularly ensuring that the culture of a school does not suffer. It is understandable that having to establish such a system may result in an 'us and them' divide between different members of the school workforce which could prove divisive, this fits with Hall and Noyes' (2009:314-330) identification of a centralised culture and suggests a real concern that NRwS may create new relationships *within* schools. Some participants speak of similar problems and it is apparent these could bring greater strain on the head personally if they alone are perceived to be the 'internal inspector', who is checking up on

colleagues. Such a situation could even lead to the headteacher skirting around issues for fear of upsetting individual staff or damaging the school's culture in the short term. From this perspective, having an objective, external eye through school inspection can be considered essential to ensure effectiveness and may also provide support for the headteacher in some situations.

Autonomy versus accountability

The data highlights that the role of a primary headteacher has many facets, including leading and managing a variety of internal and external stakeholders, all of whom have their own reasons for wanting a school to be effective. Interested parties range from parents concerned to receive the best education for their most precious 'commodity', as discussed by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005:38), through to an official and formal appraisal by Ofsted. This fits with Barzano's (2009:190) description of both formal and informal systems being used to measure performance.

The dilemma heads can face in satisfying the performativity measures and accountabilities from both internal and external stakeholders is evident in the data collected. This supports the findings of Thomson (2009:74), who describes the conflict heads can

experience whilst trying to satisfy differing, and sometimes opposing, demands from different perspectives. Many respondents comment that they often feel torn between what they would ideally choose to do to improve experiences for their pupils, and what they have to do to satisfy external expectations. Hence, the quandary heads can face between the autonomy they enjoy and the accountabilities they must address is perceptible.

The headteachers in this study demonstrate a considerable level of autonomy in many situations, including deciding how, what, where and when to carry out self-evaluation. They feel less autonomy about why they evaluate, there is little choice as the requirement is intrinsic to the bureaucratic accountability expectations of Ofsted. Thus the 'who' question is also answered. An important distinction is to identify what a headteacher deems success or school effectiveness to be as this is likely to influence how they deal with the intrinsic accountabilities in leading a primary school. Will a head place most significance on topping league tables, developing a school to his or her vision, establishing a collaborative culture for staff, gaining an outstanding Ofsted judgement or having happy children – or are all of these outcomes mutually achievable? Having some autonomy will allow different personalities to place differing emphases on each aspect and other stakeholders are also likely to

influence such decisions, so for instance, an outstanding school will perhaps receive less explicit direction from a local authority in comparison to a school which is considered less successful.

The constraints of balancing a head's autonomy with their accountability expectations is identified by Thomson (2009:121-9) and MacBeath (2006a:109). Some headteachers surveyed believe that below their surface-level autonomy there is an underlying sensation that they are constantly answerable to someone, to either satisfy performativity measures or stakeholders. Perryman's (2009) Panopticon metaphor is of relevance, with headteachers feeling the pervading presence of a self-inspection regime that is their responsibility to administer, which is pertinent to the focus of Research Question 1. It also perhaps explains why only seven per cent of participants are positive about the additional autonomy intrinsic to the self-evaluation requirement of NRwS.

The link between accountability and school effectiveness is of particular note in the data collected, with almost half of the heads surveyed doubting whether inspection actually helps to improve a school. This leads to a fundamental consideration of the purpose of school inspection - is it intended to help pupils, to raise standards or to inform the government? MacBeath (2008:385) argues that

inspection is designed to satisfy accountabilities rather than for school improvement and many participants agree with this. It can be perceived that the preparation for inspection, not least the introspection necessary to self-evaluate together with the new initiatives introduced in the aftermath, should develop a school, although the data collected highlights the drain on human resources caused by an Ofsted visit. Plowright (2007:375) describes the tension of having the "dual objective" of inspecting to help improve schools alongside holding them to account, which many respondents echo. It seems fair to assume that no head relishes the scrutiny of a visit from Ofsted, but it has become established practice, with the implied threat and anticipation almost serving as a head's additional conscience. The panoptic effect of this insidious type of accountability can be particularly difficult for the headteacher, as alongside the personal implications of inspection judgements, part of the head's role is to almost act as the school's 'custodian' as an internal inspector, by carrying out monitoring tasks and self-evaluations and reminding other stakeholders of Ofsted's expectations. This self-inspection is arguably the activity most likely to actually effect improvements, although of course, it could be far less powerful if Ofsted did not exist.

Most respondents agree it is reasonable to be held to account for one's actions whilst demonstrating value for money, as primary schools are publicly funded. This suggests those surveyed generally recognise accountability to be an intrinsic part of headship, which is consistent with Bottery's (2007:96) research where heads do not really question the need to be accountable, and helps to address Research Question 2 by indicating that the respondents perceive accountability to Ofsted as intrinsic to the headship role. Those heads who take the most positive stance argue they would still do what was right for their school if Ofsted did not exist or if they were not held to account in other ways. However, some noted this may possibly not happen in all schools or with all heads, so the notion of a headteacher's moral accountability becomes apparent.

The impression given by respondents is that their moral accountability is due to their own values and beliefs, rather than because they are complying with an official directive. The data generated are particularly interesting here, with extreme responses shown between those who feel most accountable to Ofsted and those who feel most accountability to their pupils, with fewer responses in the middle ground. Clearly, a head's own philosophy and attitudes are likely to impact on his or her approach. One head made the

distinction between whom she feels accountable to and those that hold her to account, which succinctly sums up this dilemma.

The study indicates that accountability to Ofsted is far more pervasive than a two day visit made to a school every few years, but is a constant consideration and a major feature of a head's role.

Agency

The demands of meeting expectations within the NRwS framework clearly impact on individual headteachers in differing ways. There is a broad spectrum identified in the study, ranging from heads with a strong belief in their leadership abilities that see an Ofsted inspection as an unnecessary intrusion on their vision, to those made ill by the process or influenced into changing career. These latter type of heads act consistently with Whitaker's (1993:61) 'Defenders' or even Flintham's (2003:3) 'Stumblers'. There is positive news, however, as some participants find the inspection process empowering as it gives them a greater conviction in their own capabilities.

It is important to acknowledge the sense of agency which will underpin a head's approach, as a headteacher who embraces external directives, such as the SEF requirement, and strives to achieve these,

is likely to be better placed at the time of inspection than a headteacher who has been fearful of, or even indifferent to, the expectation. Personal beliefs may influence the head's approach, as may the specific circumstances of his or her school, such as the number of pupils on roll or its socio-economic situation.

The study indicates that different individuals will approach the role of primary headship in differing ways. From the data, it has proved possible to categorise the participants into three main groups:

- **Agentials** – those heads with a clear strategic overview of their school, being proactive about the inspection process and prepared to stand up to scrutiny by Ofsted.

- **Opportunists** – those heads that are confidently working to improve their school and see Ofsted as an opportunity to justify their endeavours.

- **Procrastinators** – those that are more negative in their approach, reluctant to make changes and consider Ofsted to be an inconvenience, or even a threat.

These categories are similar to those documented by Whitaker (1993:61), with the difference being that the Agential Headteachers

here are even more positive and productive than his 'Prospectors', which have greater parallels with the second group identified in this study.

Focusing on the interview participants, Lucy falls into the Agential group:

> I had spoken to so many people and I'd read so many reports, so I'd done a lot of homework before they turned up, whereas a lot of people say, 'oh they'll see me as they find me'.....that is hugely naïve. (I4)

Adam again takes this positive stance:

> You've got to work with these people, there's no point being against them....I've sat in many a heads' meeting and some people are there just to make a racket and moan about things, but they're the ones whose schools, perhaps, leave a bit more to be desired. (I2)

Adam's viewpoint fits with Moore *et al*'s (2002:179) recognition that successful headteachers will endeavour to fit their own philosophy into wider educational initiatives. It is apparent that both Lucy and Adam are confident headteachers and have a strong sense of agency. They show acceptance of performativity measures and have made the considered decision to work proactively with the system, for the benefit of their particular schools.

Sara and Jack also illustrate self-belief about their respective roles within the Ofsted process, and can be identified as Opportunists. Jack, whose school is showing rapid signs of improvement, says:

> Because we'd been honest in the SEF and because I'd been honest in the phone call, I think we took control of the inspection.....it wasn't something that they came in and did to us....you have to be prepared to stand up and say, 'I want you to look at this, this is the evidence I want you to see, as well as this'. (I1)

These interviewees again show acceptance of performativity measures and demonstrate agency. However, they differ to the Agential Heads because they are still striving for improvements and perceive an Ofsted inspection as an opportunity to verify their actions and developments. This type of headteacher is quite systematic and those interviewed acknowledge the almost formulaic approach they take to enable their staff and school to aspire towards the next level.

In contrast, Adrian can be categorised as a Procrastinator. His responses reveal some apathy in his approach to headship, he is particularly negative about inspection, albeit with the best interests of his pupils at heart:

> It's a feeling of inadequacy that I actually often don't know what to do....paradoxically I often feel that I know what the things are that I need to do, but I just

> don't have the time to do them....I suppose maybe one of the things that has always held me back is that I am not prepared to give 100 per cent, or even 90 per cent. I'm prepared to give 80 something per cent, but I do believe I do a good job, I really care about my children and I more than put in the time. (I9)

Adrian's frankness shows that he is dismissive of accountability measures and not prepared to commit totally to the inspection process. This can be perceived as negative, although from another perspective it could arguably indicate a greater belief in his own capabilities, because he does not feel obliged to conform to national directives. A major problem with the approach is ensuring that all stakeholders are in accord and prepared to accept the consequences of a weak Ofsted judgement. Notably, Adrian is the most negative interviewee with regard to the personal strain due to performativity expectations, stating he feels sometimes the process could even kill him, which exemplifies the conflict he faces in balancing his principles against the wider expectations of his role.

It appears that a pragmatic, agential head is more likely to actively engage a wide variety of stakeholders to help assess his or her school and to confirm evaluations, which is likely to lead to an objective and thorough overview. From this standpoint, Ofsted will then help to empower the headteacher, so it can be perceived that such bureaucratic accountability will prove beneficial for the head in some

situations, which adds an additional dimension to the focus of Research Question 2 by suggesting the process can do more than just satisfy external expectations.

A school's culture has been identified in the study as fundamental to how a school will operate. This will include what the staff feel and do, how the pupils learn and the importance given to relationships with parents and other stakeholders. The influence of the head to this culture, whichever category they best represent, is palpable. If a head shows agency by being proactive and enthusiastic, then it is likely this positive energy will permeate other aspects of school life. Likewise, a procrastinating head will probably inject some inherent negativity and apathy into his or her wider school culture, which could have quite unconstructive repercussions. Clearly, nobody can predict or mould a headteacher's character and outlook on life, although awareness of the influence they hold may help individuals to reflect on their approach.

Competing in the inspection game

The perception of inspection as a game, as identified by Jeffrey (2002:537) and Fidler and Atton (2004:237), is pertinent and a number of respondents remark on the analogy. Ofsted can be perceived the

referee of the inspection game, with the manager and players (being the head and teachers) perhaps not always totally aware of the rules, or possibly not valuing those particular regulations as much as others they believe in. The team just know they must score as many 'goals' as possible, for the good of their school. An element of facade, as identified by Hargreaves (1995:120), probably has to be penetrated so the referee will gain a fair impression of the game. Furthermore, some of the players perhaps have less appreciation of the implications of winning, because it will not affect them as personally as it might the headteacher. It must also be asked whether a particular school team actually has the will to win, or do they just want the game to be over as quickly as possible so that they can relax and enjoy their relative freedoms again.

The culpable nature of headship, as highlighted by Hart (2004) in his 'Football Manager Syndrome' analogy, has led to something approaching hysteria on occasion, with rumours passing between heads and teachers about the Ofsted process, due to fears about how the result may reflect on them professionally and personally, and there is certainly evidence of this during interviews. Due to the high stakes of a poor Ofsted report, particularly for the headteacher, it can be perceived that inspection can be quite a precarious game to play

but if the results prove to be impressive then this can lead to a winning situation, or a virtuous circle, for members of the team.

The identification of a virtuous circle, with an inspection report feeding into a school's development and ultimately its levels of success, is important to the study. This supports Harris' (2004:3) recognition of the need for an equation to establish a link between leadership and effective schools, which helped inform the design of Research Question 3.

A school that receives a positive inspection is publicly affirmed and may influence potential parents to choose that school for their children in the future. Hence, the inspection process is not only concerned with bureaucratic accountability but will potentially impact on a school's marketing and popularity. It follows that the opposite outcome of having a weak or inadequate inspection could trigger a vicious circle, as it may cause a headteacher's resignation or dismissal, or influence parents to move their children to a different school. These negative issues could then result in staff dissatisfaction or possible redundancies, as fewer pupils on roll would lead to budget reductions. Furthermore, the local authority gauge their levels of monitoring or support on inspection judgements to a considerable extent, which in turn would place more pressure on the

head if a school is deemed to be at risk. Hence, it is apparent that a two-day Ofsted snapshot of a school's effectiveness may have far-reaching consequences, positive or negative, for a school.

The themes identified are now used to address the three research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

HOW DO PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE IN THE 2005 OFSTED FRAMEWORK?

The findings in relation to Research Question 1 indicate that primary school headteachers generally perceive their role as quite fundamental to the inspection process. They are often the only member of staff in a school affected by inspection on a daily basis, not least due to the SEF they write being a public document which is always on view to the external inspection body. This omnipresence of Ofsted highlights the panoptic effect on schools, but particularly on their headteachers. However, the necessity for a type of self-inspection, with the head almost acting as Foucault's (1995:195) "seeing machine", or Ofsted's agent within a school, will also place additional pressure on other staff and may even alter a school's underlying culture. A potential strain on relationships between the headteacher and colleagues within a school is possible and will

increase the dilemma felt in endeavouring to provide an objective evaluation for Ofsted.

The evidence suggests there are opportunities for heads to put their own 'stamp' on the 2005 Ofsted framework. This may be through deciding what to include in the SEF, which stakeholders to involve in planning discussions, or choosing how to work with internal and external evaluators and evaluations. The opportunity for such autonomy can be perceived as a positive element and suggests that heads will be valued for their input, albeit it will also help enable inspectors to judge the quality of a school's leadership.

Numerous examples are found in the data of heads being instrumental in effecting their schools' self-evaluation and working closely with Ofsted inspectors, alongside carrying out the day-to-day job of leading and managing a school. Nevertheless, one head's description of the 'spinning plates scenario' sums up the sense of pace and precariousness a primary head may experience in the inspection process.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

HOW DO PRIMARY HEADTEACHERS DESCRIBE THEIR ACCOUNTABILITY TO OFSTED?

Analysis of the data with respect to Research Question 2 indicates that the primary headteacher respondents feel highly accountable to Ofsted, partly because of the external and highly prescriptive nature of the inspection process and also due to the ubiquitous threat of inspection between visits. Many participants believe NRwS to have flaws, including the disproportionate emphasis on SATs results, with schools being judged on pupils' performance. Some headteachers also consider inspection to be an unfair system due to disparity between school settings or inspection teams. The importance of the head is thus found to be vital in ensuring that the unique story of a primary school is told clearly in the SEF, which should help to explain examination results but go further to elucidate the very culture of a school. This is consistent with Cullingford's (1999:3) observation that measuring and recognising a successful school is complicated and dependent on far more than one brief inspection.

The primary headteachers surveyed tend to approach their accountabilities to Ofsted in differing ways, this will depend partly on their own beliefs and philosophies but also on their confidence and capabilities. Some will become anxious, some almost belligerent,

whereas others will strive to do all they can to satisfy the demands of this external accountability. Not all individuals will be as proficient at communicating their evaluations as others may be, and again this could impact on a school. The implications of inspection can be immense for headteachers, not least due to the very public reporting system and the professional liability that individuals can face. The main dilemma for the heads in the study is reconciling formal accountability to Ofsted with that to other stakeholders, whilst balancing these with their personal values and moral responsibility.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN HEADTEACHERS' INTERPRETATION OF THEIR ROLE AND THE OFSTED EXPERIENCE?

The data suggests that a constructive, agential approach is likely to help towards gaining the best possible inspection outcome. School performance data and evidence obtained during the inspection will be crucial; however, it can be perceived that the quality of self-evaluation, the head's part in shaping a school's culture and the approach taken during inspection may all help influence the judgements made. Admittedly, this finding is from a limited number of headteacher participants and contrasts markedly from much

literature reviewed, such as Lonsdale and Parsons (1998) who argue that inspection is likely to disempower individual heads, and Barzano (2009) who describes the naming and shaming culture, with heads being denigrated publicly after a weak inspection.

The importance of having a confident, agential head is apparent, and those respondents from outstanding or improving schools appear to embody a particularly optimistic stance. Whether this self-assurance is a result of receiving a positive inspection outcome or whether the confident stance helps create that judgement is difficult to gauge, but both can be perceived as important elements of the virtuous circle of school effectiveness. It is perhaps understandable that heads who receive a weaker judgement are less inclined to feel positive, even to the point of saying as much to inspectors, as one interviewee describes. Although the ability to 'talk the talk' is identified as a major feature of a head's confidence, this will never be enough alone and must be corroborated with hard evidence. The charismatic leader, as described by Thomson (2009:57-59), is perhaps most likely to take such a positive approach, which is possibly one reason that such a style is highly sought after for new headteacher appointees.

The study indicates there may be a link between how a headteacher interprets and fulfils his or her role, and how this will impact on the

successes of a school and how it is perceived at inspection. This implies that when a headteacher assumes some degree of autonomy in the Ofsted process, and keeps focused on his or her school and its areas for development, not only may the headteacher be considered more effectual but it could lead to the best possible inspection outcome in relation to the school's circumstances, which indicates that heads must also 'walk the talk' for sustained success. This acknowledgement supports the idea of schools working within a virtuous circle, as it can be seen that one positive effect may instigate another.

CONCLUSION

The study investigates the implications of Ofsted's New Relationship with Schools framework for primary headteachers. The head is found to be quite instrumental to the inspection process, by preparing a school for inspection through self-evaluation and being prepared to tell the unique story of a school. It is recognised that the headteacher can exercise some autonomy in the process, by choosing how to carry out internal evaluations and how to use these to inform the inspectorate. However, it is apparent that multiple accountabilities can place individual heads under pressure, not least by endeavouring to find a balance between satisfying all

stakeholders whilst being mindful of their personal culpability in the process. The purpose of inspection is questioned by many heads, and it is understandable that if the process is not valued then its intrinsic accountability may be met with some hostility, or heads may be reduced to complying with short-term expectations but not fully participating in Ofsted's New Relationship to help effect improvements in a school.

The study identifies that the head could influence an inspection to some extent, to either positive or negative effect, due to the sense of agency they show in preparing for inspection and, perhaps more importantly for the long-term benefit of the school, in the culture they help engender for staff and pupils.

The main study is concluded in Chapter 6 by placing these findings in a wider context.

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CHAPTER 6

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CONCLUDING THE MAIN STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explore the primary headteacher's role in the Ofsted inspection process, particularly since the introduction of the New Relationship with Schools. The study gauges the views of a considerable number of serving headteachers, through a questionnaire and follow-up interviews with ten of the initial respondents. Chapter 6 concludes the main study with a broader discussion following the themes identified from the literature review and data analysis. These include the negative and positive effects of inspection and the parallels to be found between undertaking inspection and the quantitative/qualitative debate of educational research. The implications of the study are considered with respect to the education profession and suggestions made for future related research, together with some possible questions to pose to the Ofsted inspectorate.

SUMMARIZING THE FINDINGS

Primary heads' contributions to NRwS

The study highlights that the expectations of Ofsted's New Relationship with Schools have resulted in a number of implications for primary headteachers. The terminology of 'relationship' implies there is an intention to have a professional rapport or partnership between schools and the inspectorate, and it is apparent that a considerable proportion of this relationship from a school's perspective will be with the head. However, the accountability inherent to NRwS means there is a hierarchy of power, as described by MacBeath *et al* (2000:95), so the relationship cannot be an equal partnership.

The study identifies many issues for the primary head to address in order to fulfil Ofsted's NRwS criteria, alongside carrying out a complex day-to-day role. This is consistent with Thomson's (2009:124) research, where heads are expected to be the public face of the school, both in writing the SEF and during the inspection itself, whilst leading a multi-faceted organisation and keeping the wellbeing of pupils at heart. The conflict in balancing internal and external expectations proves demanding for some, not least trying to fulfil personal values and philosophies alongside addressing statutory directives and meeting performativity measures. Such

demands may help to explain problems with headteacher recruitment and retention, as identified by Bottery (2007:90).

Headship is fundamentally the same role wherever it takes place, although each school is unique and experiences will vary. This acknowledgment is particularly pertinent with respect to the amount of time a head can devote to the inspection process and the number of other personnel who may be able to contribute to self-evaluation or inspection preparations.

As the study concludes, a further change to educational leadership is emerging which may prove to have considerable implications for the profession. The Department for Education (DfE) has very recently announced that the NPQH will no longer be a mandatory qualification for new headteachers (National College, 2012), albeit it will remain as a recommended option for professional development. It is stated by the DfE that the aim behind this decision is to allow headteachers greater freedoms to make their own choices in leadership. This can clearly be perceived as a positive move and suggests that more trust is to be placed with individual heads, not least in their self-evaluations. Conversely, it may suggest that with a lessening accountability at a local authority level, there will be greater potential for weaknesses or disparities to develop between

schools. This could indicate there will be a greater need for Ofsted in the longer term, alongside placing an increased pressure on school governing bodies to ensure the headteacher is fulfilling his or her role successfully. Leading a school through so many habitual changes, due to local or national initiatives is one demand of headship which cannot be underestimated. However, the change in approach necessary due to the expectations of NRwS has perhaps proved to be the most notable adjustment that heads have needed to make in recent years.

Changes in the New Relationship

Over 17 per cent of respondents note concerns about the changes made under the NRwS framework, these include having a shorter notice period and the requirement to write a SEF, but particularly the emphasis given to performativity measures rather than supporting schools towards sustainable effectiveness. Hence, inspection is considered a summative type of assessment, rather than being formative or developmental in nature, which is consistent with Plowright and Godfrey's (2008:37) understanding. However, the relatively small proportion of respondents who commented negatively suggests that NRwS has proved more popular than may have been anticipated at its onset.

The self-evaluation requirement of NRwS has been met with suspicion by a similarly small proportion of respondents, being deemed more of a cost-cutting measure than a shared activity to aid school improvement. These headteachers perceived self-evaluation as a type of self-inspection which was identified by MacBeath (2006a:57), and fits Foucault's (1977) and Perryman's (2009) Panopticon metaphor where heads can feel under a constant pressure from inspection. This acknowledgement supports Devos and Verhoeven's (2003:404) belief that headteachers need to be trusted and considered equal partners in the inspection process for real benefits to be felt. However, it is notable that many heads who participated are generally quite positive about NRwS in comparison to previous frameworks, they particularly like having greater input through self-evaluation and less stress due to shorter notice. This suggests these heads feel quite empowered by the changes which have allowed them greater active contribution to the inspection process.

Almost half of respondents query whether inspection actually leads to school improvement, which is consistent with Perryman's (2009) study. However, the issue of being held to account is not really questioned, which suggests accountability is well entrenched in our performativity culture. Balancing multiple accountabilities alongside

just managing the 'day job' highlights the personal pressure many headteachers can feel, with moral accountability sometimes proving at odds with satisfying more bureaucratic measures.

Accountability for a purpose

Understanding the purpose for having school inspection appears to be fundamental to how schools, and their headteachers, recognise and manage their accountability expectations, as it is evident that inspection can be quite emotive for those most affected. It must, however, be acknowledged that there are forms of accountability in all walks of life, so for example, banks will have a version of inspection or often salespeople are obliged to sell a certain amount of goods and driving instructors will have their own proficiencies checked regularly. Personnel in different organisations have to find their own strategies to cope with whatever criteria are used to hold them to account. The main distinction in schools, perhaps, is that the state of the nation's education is quite publicly reported and is regularly deemed newsworthy, which can have considerable implications for those being named and shamed. There are a number of potential reasons for this, including the fact that our children are a precious commodity, as described by Leithwood and Jantzi, (2005:38), and ultimately comprise the future prospects of the nation.

It is further apparent that many members of society have an opinion on education, not least because almost all will have had their own direct experience of it, whereas driving tests, banks or sales figures are not likely to engender quite the same emotions in the populace. It can also be perceived that occasionally it may be popular to criticize the teaching profession as a whole, due to public perceptions over issues such as pupil discipline, falling educational standards or long school holidays, as this perhaps helps to justify negative views from some members of society due to experiences in their own school days. Schools can sometimes be almost used to evaluate the state of wider society, one interviewee even describes how schools have allegedly either created a problem or are expected to resolve it, which is likely to resound with many educational professionals.

The Quantitative/Qualitative divide within inspection

A main measure used to judge schools of all phases will be the performance of pupils in public examinations. It is apparent that the results obtained will have considerable implications for the pupils taking the tests, but they will also have huge implications for the school as a whole. The reliance on examinations to determine school league tables can bring doubts as to their reliability due to disparities between pupil cohorts or concerns with examination questions. This

recognition fits with Torrance's (2011:477) research which questions the validity of primary school SATs results due to the suggestion that teachers may teach a narrower curriculum specifically for pupils to pass such a test. Hence, it is apparent that pupils may not receive such an extensive education which will not help progress society in the longer term. Notwithstanding such observations, examination results have been compared for decades and are the performativity measure used to inform a school's and national RAISE data. Such an input/output ratio, as described by Lyotard (1984:88) will inform Ofsted prior to inspection, and may even trigger an earlier inspection if the data highlights any obvious dips in performance. However, as Cullingford (1999:212) argues, the system must be questioned when a measurement of outcomes appears to be more important than the outcomes themselves, which implies there is far more value in observing the culture of a school and the children and staff within it, by taking a more qualitative approach.

Concern has certainly been expressed by the headteachers in the study about an over-reliance on test data. It is identified that the head will play a vital role in ensuring that, through self-evaluations and in conversations with inspectors, a richer story is told of a school than can be achieved by data alone. Implicit links to the debate between the respective values of quantitative and qualitative data to

inform educational research are notable here. In consideration of the benefits stated for taking a mixed methods approach in research, it is also apparent that a school encompasses far more than just examination results and the richness of more qualitative data, with respect to a school's culture and the wider curriculum enjoyed, will help to illustrate this for inspectors.

Negative and positive effects of inspection

Much of the literature surrounding school inspection, particularly since the inception of Ofsted, has been quite negative. This includes debate about the process itself and whether it will benefit schools and lead to greater effectiveness, questions posed by Cullingford (1999) and Earley (1996:11) in the early years of the inspectorate, and by researchers such as Plowright (2007:375) and Leithwood and Day (2008:2), more recently.

Alongside a focus on education, concern has been expressed by respondents about the negative effects for teachers and school leaders personally, which is consistent with research by Jeffrey and Woods (1996) Chapman (2001) Plowright (2007) and Crawford (2009). Many of these issues reverberate in the study, with evidence cited of anxieties that primary headteachers can feel due to their

autonomy and the accountability expectations made of them. However, some literature (see MacBeath, 2008, and Robinson, 2011) takes a contrasting stance and describes more encouraging features of inspection, such as the sense of empowerment that a head may feel after a positive inspection and the opportunities it may initiate. This finding is corroborated in the study to some extent, as a group of headteachers has been identified whom found the Ofsted process to be beneficial to their schools and to their own development, albeit these are mostly heads whose schools had received higher inspection outcomes.

Can headteachers make a difference?

Analysis of the quantitative data in the study indicates that the approach taken by each headteacher may possibly have some effect on an inspection outcome, although this could also be influenced by other factors such as the head's experience and their school's circumstances. This tentative finding was further investigated by scrutinizing qualitative questionnaire comments and especially during interviews, made possible by taking a mixed methods approach. It was found that headteachers with agential powers, as identified by Woods *et al* (2004:451) are perhaps best placed to lead their school, which helps establish a virtuous circle of school

effectiveness. This finding is consistent with Ouston and Davies' (1998:13-24) belief that schools should strive for a positive culture, and Hall and Noyes' (2009:314) identification of a collaborative culture proving to be the most effective, as well as being probably the most pleasant to work within.

The possibility for individual inspectors to bring some subjectivity to their approach is discussed, with over 20 per cent of respondents making a specific comment about the importance of having a positive and open inspection team whom encourage a constructive dialogue. This fits with Harris and Day's (2003:94) view that successful headteachers need to form productive relationships, which again will help engender a positive school culture. The study highlights that this rapport should ideally encompass Ofsted inspectors alongside other stakeholders, which hopefully can then create a productive New Relationship from both perspectives. Moreover, it was found that the headteacher is fundamental to the stance adopted by all in a school, which supports MacBeath's (2008:390) observation that heads who approach the inspection process as an opportunity, rather than a threat, are likely to engender the best possible outcome. A head's sense of agency will not in itself make a school effective, but will enable it to be seen in the best light possible. This finding has potential implications for the professional

practice of headteachers, and may help to inform fellow practitioners of a possible approach to take in future inspections.

Inspection – a game of two halves

The analogy of the inspection process being a game proves noteworthy for the study. Comparing school inspection with a team sport could be perceived as trivializing the Ofsted process, although many parallels are apparent. These include the headteacher being compared with a football manager (Hart, 2004), and the potential vulnerability evident in the respective roles if all does not go well. Such game-playing could clearly have repercussions for schools and the wider process, as any improvements made or effective practice seen could prove to be quite transitory for a school, which will not help the pupils or staff in the longer-term as the situation may regress after an inspection. Hence, approaching inspection from a game perspective may reduce self-evaluation to making 'quick fixes' to gain a positive outcome, rather than working towards sustainable school effectiveness. Furthermore, the whole basis of inspection judgements could then be quite inaccurate which may lead to careful questioning as to the purpose and merits of the whole process. A further game analogy could arguably surround the expectations made of heads and their staff as new inspection frameworks are

introduced or evaluation judgements change. Some heads referred to this as the 'goalposts moving' which would be quite unfeasible in many sporting games, but does arguably happen in education and can prove particularly demanding for the headteacher.

The study found that the primary school headteacher is one of the key players in the Ofsted game, and that they have the potential to exercise some autonomy within their wider accountability umbrella. Although much literature cites the negative effects of inspection, some academic research suggests there are potential benefits to inspection, for contemporary education and for an individual school and its headteacher. It is argued here that a feasible approach is to play this high stakes game with an acknowledgement that there are some vagaries in the rules, albeit Ofsted hold the power and the rule book. Additionally, it is proposed that confident and proactive headteachers with a strong sense of agency place themselves in a healthy position to achieve the best possible inspection outcome in relation to their schools' circumstances.

The study led to a conclusion that not only will an inspection have a considerable impact on the primary headteacher, but that the primary headteacher may have some impact on the inspection.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Implications for primary headteachers

As a headteacher, it is perhaps easy to perceive inspection to be an exceptional event which occurs every few years and can be almost forgotten in the interim period. This study is intended to widen headteachers' understanding of the inspection process and to consider the short and longer term ramifications of Ofsted visits, whilst providing some insight in order to gain the best possible outcome for individual schools.

The importance of identifying a school's culture is something that may resonate with many headteachers. Every school is different, as are the personalities involved, and the challenges will vary. The study indicates that it is a fundamental part of the head's role to identify the issues specific to a school, and to tackle these whilst celebrating the school's uniqueness. Headteachers do have some choices in this process, there are national expectations and mandatory requirements to the role, but individuals are able to exercise some autonomy in how they approach their headship and in the school culture they help to engender. There will be intrinsic accountability, which may range from Ofsted's bureaucracy to that derived from a head's own morals, but another aspect of the headteacher's role is to satisfy all of these multiple accountabilities

whilst running a school. This acknowledgment may help to empower headteachers, alongside the understanding that inspection is a type of game, albeit one with high stakes and a constantly evolving rule book. The game analogy almost then sets inspection as a challenge, for the head to learn the rules and prepare his or her team for the contest. It can be argued that taking this approach and accepting from the outset that there will be winners and losers, could mean the implications of the Ofsted game are slightly lessened for heads, or at least made more tolerable.

The identification of a virtuous circle of school effectiveness is noteworthy, as it is apparent that one fruitful outcome may well prompt another, so excellent SATs results will support a positive inspection which will encourage parents to choose a school. Not all schools are deemed to be effective, however, and much literature describes the negative effects of inspection. A key task for headteachers is to develop a sound understanding of what constitutes school effectiveness, and to strive for this in their particular school. The virtuous circle continues when heads align their vision to this effectiveness, to ensure positive academic and social outcomes for pupils, which can be perceived to be the ultimate motivation for headteachers.

It is apparent that an agential approach is being advocated here, although it is important to acknowledge this agency may also be the underlying intention of those in authority, in the belief that adopting such an attitude may support school effectiveness. From this perspective, agential heads are complying with the system, by doing what Ofsted intends. However, it can be argued that if this engenders the most positive and productive environment to develop schools and their pupils, then the inspection game could result in a mutually agreeable score draw.

Suggestions for further research

Following identification of the themes emerging from this study, a number of opportunities for future research are apparent.

It would be informative to revisit the same interviewees after a subsequent inspection, although this was beyond the scope of this study. Such a follow-up could provide opportunity to investigate whether participants' schools have shown improvement over time, in order to explore the underlying assumption that the fundamental purpose of inspection is to improve schools. It would also be useful to consider whether individual heads' beliefs had shifted, and whether this may be dependent on their increased experience,

developments that had taken place in their schools or the external accountabilities of Ofsted.

It may prove beneficial if a follow-up study had the capacity to invite additional stakeholders to participate, including other school staff, governors, headteachers from other school phases and Ofsted inspectors. This research design could usefully investigate whether the demands and conflicts intrinsic to these respective roles in the inspection process are comparable to the experiences of primary headteachers.

Analysis of the survey data indicated that the size of primary school may have some influence on its inspection outcome. It would be of potential interest to carry out further research to explore if the trends identified in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 are replicated nationally. This could provide useful information for the inspectorate and may enable individual headteachers to reflect on the best approach to take in order to evaluate and celebrate the size of their particular school.

Another possible option for further research may be to investigate closely a small number of headteachers using a case study approach. This could usefully include headteachers whose schools had received contrasting inspection outcomes, from special measures to

outstanding. The heads' perceptions of inspection and their styles of leadership might be considered and contrasted, alongside the uniqueness of their schools' settings and the prioritisation they choose to afford Ofsted expectations. This may help to elucidate whether the approach taken by individual headteachers, together with their personality and leadership style, does have an influence over a school's inspection.

It is possible that as Ofsted's frameworks and expectations have changed over time then this may have affected the approach that headteachers have been encouraged to adopt, such as the greater collegiality aimed for under NRwS, which was not explicitly stated in the earlier years of Ofsted. There has been no opportunity to discuss the political influence of different frameworks in this study but again this may have had some impact on the role of headteacher and external expectations of school leaders over time, and would be worthwhile to investigate.

The subject of change is always at the forefront of education, which has positive ramifications in that amendments are generally brought with the intention of improving schools or the experiences of their pupils, albeit these changes can often fall to the head to instigate. Weindling (1998:303) notably argues that the impact of such changes

on the role of headteacher has rarely been researched. The inspection process is certainly not immune to such change, and even since the data collection there have been considerable amendments made to Section 5 inspections, including a greater focus on schools deemed less effective and the introduction of no-notice inspections in some cases. A new government in 2010 prompted even more change and a new Ofsted framework is anticipated. As the study concludes, further changes have very recently been announced by the newly appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and again have proved extremely newsworthy (Ofsted, 2012). These include even greater emphasis being placed on the quality of teaching, more outstanding schools to be re-visited and all schools being subject to no notice periods for inspection. The goalposts move again. Such amendments will bring further challenges for school personnel and for the head. It could be perceived that the requirement for an increased focus on teaching may diminish the head's role, however, it will be the headteacher who will have to ensure that his or her teachers are working at the required standard prior to an inspection, and in all probability will be expected to carry out joint observations with inspectors during a visit to corroborate the findings. Such expectations could again cause disparity in a school's culture, as the head may be perceived as carrying out an augmented form of self-inspection. Furthermore, the impending plans to carry out all

inspections with no notice for schools, could potentially lead to an even greater panoptic effect as the headteacher ensures that his or her school is in a constant state of readiness for inspection. Subsequent research could focus on such revisions to the inspection process, and more specifically how the issue of change itself affects the role of headteacher.

The lack of educational research from the perspective of the headteacher is highlighted by Crawford (2009:15) and was a major consideration of the research design. Additional practitioner research is welcomed from serving headteachers, as there is limited literature from this viewpoint. It is acknowledged that busy working schedules may preclude this, but more research which transcends the divide between academia and educational practice would undoubtedly benefit the profession.

Questions for Ofsted's inspectorate

As the study has explored the New Relationship between headteachers and the inspectorate, the themes emerging generate a number of questions which those in the Ofsted organisation may like to consider.

A key question to pose is whether Ofsted has considered developing an inspection system with some continuity inbuilt? Ideally, the same inspectors might revisit the same school for subsequent inspections, or perhaps carry out a follow-up visit to look at progress made. This idea supports Ehren and Visscher's (2008:225) view that such monitoring activities would make the inspection process more effective and help to build a sustainable relationship between internal and external stakeholders, this is particularly pertinent since the lessening function of many local authorities. Such a revision may enhance the school improvement aspect of inspection and enable the headteacher and inspectors to increase the trust between the opposing teams and reduce the anxiety often felt. This may be a move towards a true partnership, rather than the 'us and them' relationship which concerned Jeffrey (2002:541). Furthermore, the 'element of front' as described by Hargreaves (1995:120) would be harder to maintain across regular visits, so a truer picture should prevail. However, it is acknowledged the logistics and expense of achieving such continuity may be problematic, and future inspection schedules may have to be streamlined to reflect this, or more inspectors appointed to enable follow-up visits to be achievable.

A second question to pose is whether Ofsted gives due regard to the considerable implications for headteachers under the NRwS

inspection regime? The study suggests that inspection, and its build-up, can place intense pressure on individuals and may help explain the lack of suitable candidates for the 'top job'. A nationwide support network for heads is proposed and could include an inspection helpline forum, with anonymous advice given by inspectors. This collaborative approach might provide relevant advice and provoke discussion, whilst helping to improve understanding of the implications of the inspection process from both headteacher and official perspectives. Clearly, there would be limitations to such a system, including forethought of who may moderate the forum and the possibility of increasing the isolation felt for those heads that chose not to participate. However, the positive ramifications of such a joint venture would hopefully outweigh these concerns and help to enhance the practice of all involved in the inspection process, whilst moving to a more reciprocal relationship between heads and inspectors.

As the study concludes, it is extremely heartening to find that another of the new HMCI's recommendations (Ofsted, 2012) is for headteachers of outstanding schools to become involved in inspection, indeed that they have a "moral imperative and duty to support others that are doing less well". The final question generated from the study was to enquire whether there may be any

potential for a serving headteacher to be included in every inspection team. It is gratifying to know that some of the changes so recently instigated by Ofsted mirror the suggestions made here. Current practitioners are already entitled to train to inspect with Ofsted as Additional Inspectors (Ofsted, 2009b), so this proposal will necessitate more headteachers gaining inspection accreditation. Not only is this likely to encourage a greater partnership aspect to Ofsted visits, but the judgements made will include the perspective of a professional currently meeting their own headship demands, which may help to enrich the understanding of inspection teams. It is evident that such a move will mean that headteachers will have less time in their own schools to carry out their own evaluations, although this may prove beneficial in the longer time by delegating tasks and thus helping to develop leadership skills in other members of a school team. Furthermore, if heads gain an understanding from 'both sides' of the inspection game, it may help to enhance evaluations in their own schools by objectively balancing internal and external viewpoints, whilst helping to reduce the tensions sometimes apparent between these potentially opposing teams.

CONCLUSION

The 'O Word' permeates much of school life and it is apparent that there are considerable implications to the inspection process. There will be professional and personal costs for headteachers and others in school, alongside some potential benefits. This has to be set against the official initiative of making judgements about schools and comparing their performance to justify public spending whilst aiming to provide an effective education system.

The study highlights that primary heads hold a genuine desire for their schools to be effective and want their pupils to achieve and be happy. This is also the ultimate objective of Ofsted. If the inspection process can be developed with a fundamental assumption of trust in our headteachers, greater collaboration between internal and external parties, and less reliance on data and bureaucracy, it is believed this may lead to the best possible result for all players in the English primary school inspection game.

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CHAPTER 7

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REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides the opportunity for me to reflect on my research journey and the implications for me personally, and as a primary headteacher and a researcher. Limitations to the study will also be discussed.

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

Implications for my professional practice

Having the opportunity throughout my study to explore the benefits of self-evaluation within NRwS, whilst gaining a deeper understanding of my own agency, has encouraged me to be more proactive when undertaking monitoring and evaluations than I perhaps was previously. In addition, my research has allowed me the opportunity to openly discuss the concepts with local

headteacher colleagues and my academic supervisors, which has proved beneficial for my professional practice whilst informing my deeper reflections. I feel this has helped make me a more effective leader, even though it could be perceived that I do indeed carry out a form of self-inspection, using the Panopticon analogy.

Campbell *et al* (2009) make the pertinent comment that practitioner research such as mine, will enable the researcher to view his or her own school in a new light, this has certainly been my experience and has brought me some additional objectivity to inform my self-evaluations. Recognition of the concept of a school's culture has been particularly enlightening for my practice and has really made me question how I lead my team and why I take this approach. The fact that I now even ask such questions tends to imply that my leadership has evolved over time, as has the culture of the school. My school team is positive and collaborative, there is an excellent chemistry between individuals and our working atmosphere is generally warm and friendly, although if I am being truthful this has not been consciously steered by me as a professional, rather I have kept true to my belief that we all must do the best we can with our school's circumstances, but that doing our best can involve laughter and warmth. Furthermore, this friendliness probably helps keep our virtuous circle well lubricated as it turns. Most importantly,

perhaps, the same collaborative and caring environment has passed on to our pupils. I do believe it is vital for children to witness such positive relationships and to know that the adults in my school genuinely care about each one of the pupils and want them all to reach their potential. However, it is difficult to perceive that staff in any school do not have a similar starting point and I would be doing other heads a disservice if anything less was implied. If a school can reach such a level of positive collaboration then taking part in a type of self-inspection, whichever part an individual may play, should then be intrinsic to the wider collaborative culture. The principle aim being to make our school great by having the support and aspirations embedded for all of our pupils and staff to do as well as they possibly can.

I acknowledge that the picture I portray of my school is optimistic and quite idyllic, although there are certainly bad days and we have our problems, it would be far too simplistic to think otherwise. My styles of leadership will change depending on the circumstances, but the high expectations of all and my long-term vision never falter, albeit the day-to-day role can prove exhausting. I do not wish to leave headship defeated as one of Flintham's (2003:3) Stumblers, so I endeavour to work quite strategically and not become too anxious, to protect my personal wellbeing. This recognition fits most

comfortably with the characteristics of charismatic leaders. The unconventionality and risk-taking traits of such a leader do resound with me, but again I feel this is just as symptomatic of our Ofsted grading as it is of my leadership. I give my staff much freedom to teach as they choose to do and not be too constrained by bureaucracy, which helps engender a positive environment, but recognize that our successes have helped to encourage and almost validate a creative approach to teaching and learning – another product of the virtuous circle.

Leading the school through imposed change can be challenging as well as empowering. One of the greatest ironies for me is that the requirement to write a SEF, a main impetus for choosing the topic, actually ceases at the same time as I write my final chapters. Headteachers are going to be allowed to present their self-evaluations in the best way they see fit, so perhaps an additional element of trust is being introduced. Has the SEF served its purpose? I like to think that the process of writing and continually reviewing that weighty tome has helped me to reflect on the strengths and deficiencies in my own school. However, in darker moments, the time, energy and anxiety expended over the last seven or so years since its inception can feel a dreadful waste of time, for me and all of the other headteachers who have laboured over this document. Did I

need to agonize quite so much? I now concur this to be a 'symptom' of my agency, although the major benefit from my perspective is that my compliance, or energetic playing of the game, has afforded me some earned autonomy as identified by Robinson (2011:77), because I am the head of an outstanding school. This means that I have relative freedom to develop my school in the way I choose, to aspire to my educational vision which I believe is the best way forward to keep the school effective.

I freely acknowledge that the current inspection system for primary schools is not perfect. The reliance on performativity measures through SATs examination data, which can have its own reliability and validity questioned, is clearly not ideal. Furthermore, the notion that all schools can strive to achieve high percentages of pupils at nationally acceptable levels of attainment is admirable from one stance, but is plainly never going to be achievable for all children in all circumstances. Merely two or three generations ago in England, only a small minority of children were even required to sit examinations. Indeed, one of my own grandfathers actually left school at 12 years of age whereas his two sons became graduates, ironically both going on to be headteachers themselves. My Grandfather was a very clever man, but this understanding was always derived from more qualitative than quantitative measures.

However, as a head myself, I know that the system I must work within is one which requires impressive examination results, which I am obliged to deliver year after year, to sustain my school's outstanding status.

I am not so naïve as to not appreciate that before long we are likely to be presented with an updated version of the SEF, probably renamed and launched with aplomb, but something to ensure that schools again will present a standardized picture for Ofsted, or indeed its successor. The goalposts will move again. And will I embrace these new requirements? Yes, my agency is such that I believe that I will. In time, I can suppose that my greater experience in the role may make me a little more world-weary, but I know that if I choose to continue to carry out the role of headteacher then I will follow the expected structure, but will utilize it to present my school in its best possible light. This acknowledgement suggests that I have some of Woods *et al*'s (2004:451-2) agential powers, or at least that I am someone who has accepted the game and decided to play it to the best of my ability. However, another advantage to my research is that I now feel better informed to question professionally those in authority and any bureaucracy that I perceive to be unnecessary, whilst defending my educational vision for the benefit of the children in my school.

Relating theory and practice

Undertaking research at doctoral level has certainly proved to be a personal challenge, enabling me to develop a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding NRwS and to reflect on my own beliefs and behaviours. Burgess *et al* (2006:46) note that the relationship between theory, research and practice will constantly change as the practitioner's knowledge and understanding progress and their research develops. This recognition has resonated during my journey, as has Plowright's (2011:184) identification that our beliefs are a 'work in progress', just as the inspection process is. I have some regrets regarding the design of my study and questions that I wish I had asked. However, it sounds a cliché, but when embarking on a study as a new researcher, you don't know what you don't know! This is probably my abiding appreciation of the research process; the adventure is to enquire and to discover for oneself, it is far more than writing an extended essay with predetermined outcomes.

Taking an inductive reasoning approach seemed the best option as a practitioner researcher, I had good professional insight into the phenomenon of school inspection and could use this as a starting point to generate a theory. Using mixed methods helped me to draw inference from both the numerical and narrative data, I also find it

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quite ironical that the debate between the benefits of quantitative and qualitative research methods is continually played out in the inspection process itself. So many heads argue that the over-reliance on assessment data and statistics should be balanced with a similar weighting being given to the qualitative evidence found in schools, by observing lessons and speaking with pupils and other stakeholders. It seems that Ofsted should strive for its own mixed methodology as one type of evidence will help to illuminate the other.

Using inductive reasoning has enabled me to use the knowledge gained from the academic literature to distance myself from the data collected in my study, and to probe the findings more deeply to identify relevant themes. However, I acknowledge that my data is only as good as the questions I have posed, and my findings could have been quite different with a contrasting research design. This leads to a discussion of the limitations acknowledged in my study.

Limitations of the study

It was necessary to set some limits to the design, so the decision was made to focus on the views of headteachers, rather than including contributions from other members of school staff or governors.

Furthermore, the design did not include input from Ofsted inspectors, who were likely to have provided a contrasting perspective of the inspection process under NRwS. However, the study was distinctive in that it gauged the opinions of a substantial number of primary headteachers, all of whom shared a common experience as their schools had undergone inspection in November 2006.

It is acknowledged that limited focus has been made in the study between any contrast found between different Ofsted Regional Inspection Providers (shown in *Appendix* 3). This was a considered decision as, although the relevant data were collected, minimal differences were identified in the analysis and time and space limitations precluded further enquiry in this study. Once again, changes have been made to the inspection providers since the survey was distributed. Further research could usefully investigate whether there is any discrepancy between these providers, or if any variation between individual inspection teams may be influenced by the training and approach of their employers.

The organisation of the Ofsted database (Ofsted, 2008) meant those schools placed in an Ofsted category of inadequate or requiring special measures, had already been removed from the November

2006 inspection list when it was accessed in 2008. Limited resources made it impracticable to identify the headteachers of those schools. It is acknowledged this omission may have biased the data to some extent, as these respondents may have held some of the most negative opinions of the process and it would have been interesting to have included their perspectives, although the intention was to provide a comprehensive view of those heads that did respond.

Reflecting on the research focus

My practice has been influenced in a number of ways since commencing the study. The topic was interesting in its own right as well as highly relevant to my role of primary headteacher. I have found that articulating my concerns and exploring some of the issues surrounding inspection and the inherent performativity expectations to be quite empowering. I have to question myself whether the fact that my own school had received an outstanding inspection outcome made me more interested in the process, or whether this was coincidental. Furthermore, it could be argued that my school's success may have biased me towards headteachers with a similar approach to my own, or even subliminally, that I may have disparaged heads from less successful schools.

From a personal perspective, balancing the demands of primary headship and doctoral research, alongside being a mother, wife and daughter has been challenging at times – and perhaps helps explain a lack of practitioner research at this level. However, the sense of satisfaction I feel as I conclude my thesis is incredible, and probably dates back to the years of disappointment I felt after leaving school with mediocre O' Levels and no hope of a teaching career. However, that is another story and one for which I have to thank the Open University most sincerely. I do believe that completing my higher education as a mature student after another demanding career has made me determined and quite driven, not least in working quite strategically with a clear focus on outcomes which was my only option as an undergraduate and the mother of three young children. This style has certainly transferred to my approach to headship and perhaps helps to explain my ready acceptance of accountability measures and the sense of agency that I have.

Relating my research to my professional role

It is acknowledged that my school's Ofsted status has given me some freedoms, the virtuous circle continues to revolve and additional opportunities, for my school and personally, continue to present themselves. I truly hope this has not made me arrogant or

complacent in my headship, as I appreciate that such success can be quite transitory and cannot continue indefinitely. The culpability and vulnerability of headship will always be of concern. It is perhaps one of the most difficult paths to sustain an outstanding status as there is really only one other option, to drop below which would be perceived as a failure, just as it is for football managers. However, I believe that my best approach is to accept there is an element of game playing in the role, and to continue to celebrate the uniqueness of my school by remaining committed to my educational vision, which may involve some non-conformity alongside the confidence to uphold my beliefs.

An understanding of the insider-outsider continuum was helpful, allowing me to consider my personal viewpoint and experiences in comparison to the respondent headteachers. We are all, indeed, carrying out the same role but it is hard sometimes to relate my school setting to those in far more challenging circumstances, although there are many parallels and headship is essentially the same job wherever one works. The insight I gained as a fellow head has been invaluable, which highlights the place for practitioner research alongside that from academia. I certainly perceive this as a two-way process, I was greatly informed by the wealth of academic

research surrounding my topic, and I hope that my study will, in turn, help to inform future research.

CONCLUSION

One of my abiding memories of carrying out practitioner research at doctoral level will be the independence and tenacity needed to complete such a study. W.B. Yeats is attributed with the famous quotation:

> Education is not filling a pail but the lighting of a fire. (Brighouse and Woods, 2006:34).

This has always been my aim throughout my teaching and headship career, indeed it is the motto for my primary school. As educational professionals, I believe headteachers are in a unique position to engender a love of learning for our pupils, although this clearly has to be balanced with the many other expectations of our role. As a practitioner researcher, I like to think this same philosophy has passed into my study. I certainly do not feel that I have all the answers, although enquiring into the inspection process and exploring Ofsted's New Relationship with primary heads has helped light my fire for lifelong learning whilst informing my approach to school inspection. I trust it may also inform other primary

headteachers and help them to positively forge their own relationship with the others players in the inspection process.

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APPENDIX 1 – BLANK COPY OF THE FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

HEADTEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCHING YOUR ROLE IN THE OFSTED INSPECTION PROCESS

1. How long in total have you been a Headteacher? [Years]

2. Number on roll in your school? [NOR]

3. Do you have a teaching commitment? Yes ○ No ○

4. If so, how many hours do you teach? [Hours per week]

5. What was your school's inspection outcome in November 2006?

Outstanding **Good**

Satisfactory **Inadequate**

Please tick or circle as appropriate

Your school was inspected in November 2006, after the introduction of the Ofsted New Relationship with Schools the previous year. This legislation led to a number of changes to the inspection procedure, including the requirement for a SEF, and less notice being given prior to inspections, which were notably shorter in duration.

6. In your opinion, what was the overall **result** of the changes made to the inspection process? Better ○ About the same ○ Worse ○

Please explain your response, even if you were not the headteacher at the time:

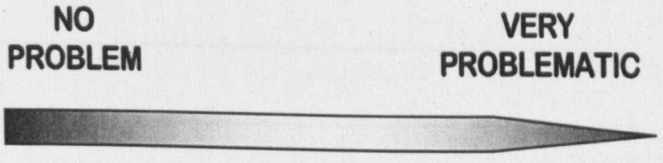
_____

_____

_____

7. Listed below are some ways that the new Ofsted requirement may have affected your **role**.

*Please mark (or shade) on each separate scale the extent to which you have found **each** aspect listed to be challenging, ranging from No Problem' through to 'Very Problematic'.*



An increase in self-evaluation practices

Supporting your staff

Ensuring the SEF is up-to-date

Personal anxiety about your future

Increased accountability

Compiling appropriate evidence

8. Please list other ways that your role is affected by the inspection process which are not mentioned in Question 7:

_____

_____

_____

9. How did the actual **inspection day(s)** themselves, or the outcome, impact on your role?

_____

_____

_____

10. Do you feel that the **size** of your school affects your role within the Ofsted process? Yes ○ No ○

If yes, please explain why:

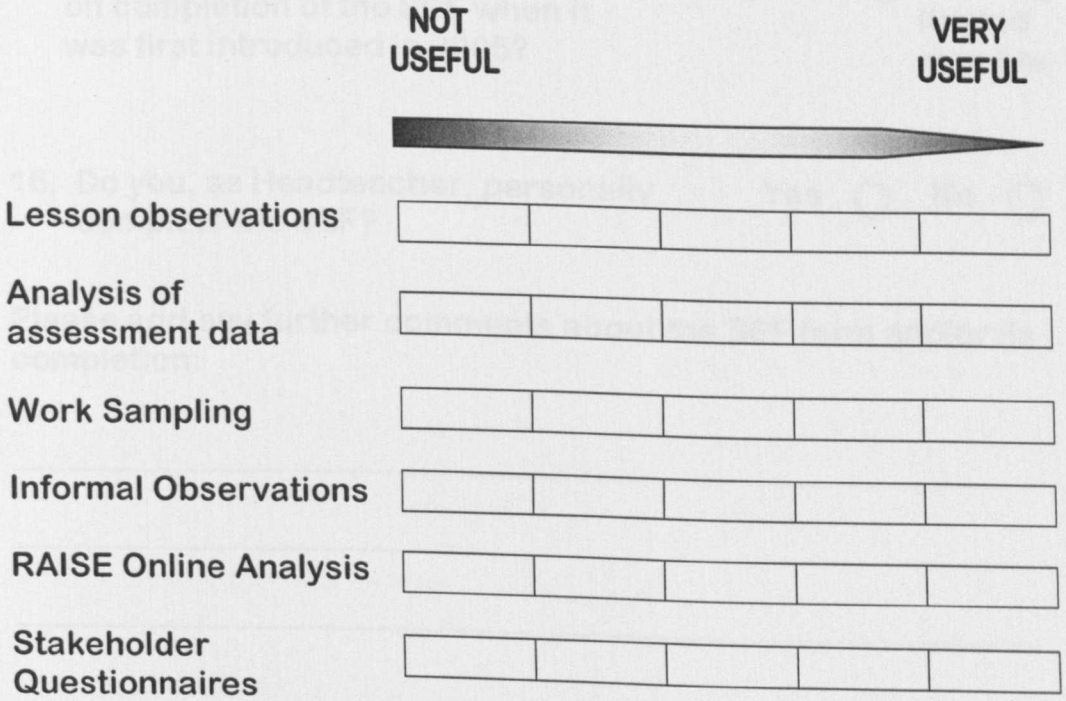
_____

_____

_____

11. Listed below are different types of **self-evaluation**.

Please mark on each separate scale the extent to which you find each type to be useful.



12. Are there other types of self-evaluation that you find useful? Yes ○ No ○

If so, what are they?

_____

_____

_____

13. Do you think the self-evaluation practices you use have changed since the Ofsted New Relationship with Schools in 2005? Yes ○ No ○

Changes made to the Ofsted requirements in 2005 mean that schools, through self-evaluation, now have the opportunity to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in the SEF, and these areas are often an inspection focus.

14. What percentage of your typical working week do you estimate is taken up with school self-evaluation? ____ %

15. Did you have sufficient guidance on completion of the **SEF** when it was first introduced in 2005? Yes ○ No ○ N/A ○ Not Head at the time

16. Do you, as Headteacher, personally complete the SEF? Yes ○ No ○

Please add any further comments about the SEF form and/or its completion:

_____

_____

_____

17. Do you involve other **stakeholders** in the self-evaluation process? Yes ○ No ○

If so, please provide detail:

_____

_____

_____

18. Do you consider that you have **autonomy** (or overall authority) to carry out the self-evaluation of your school? Yes ○ No ○

Please comment:

_____

_____

_____

19. Do you think that the level of autonomy your school now has gives you sufficient **input** into the inspection process? Yes ○ No ○

Please comment:

_____

_____

_____

20. Does the level of autonomy you experience whilst carrying out self-evaluation affect you on a **personal** level? Yes ○ No ○

If so, please provide detail:

_____

_____

_____

21. As Headteacher, to whom do you consider that you are most accountable?

Please list in order of preference, with 1 being 'most accountable to' and 6 'least accountable to'.

NB. If you do not feel any accountability to any of the groups listed, put a cross through the name.

Governing Body	☐
Pupils	☐
Parents	☐
Staff	☐
Local Authority	☐
Ofsted	☐

22. Are there any other groups/stakeholders to whom you feel accountable? Yes ○ No ○

If you answered yes, please provide detail:

_____

_____

_____

23. Do you feel your accountability has **changed** as a result of the new Ofsted requirements? Yes ○ No ○

If you answered yes, please explain:

_____

_____

_____

24. Does the accountability you experience as a Headteacher affect you on a **personal** level? Yes ○ No ○

Please explain your answer:

_____

_____

_____

YOUR DETAILS (Optional)

It would be helpful to receive your details, although please be assured that respondents will not be identified in the analysis or reporting of the data generated from this questionnaire.

Name	
School	
E-Mail	

A small number of follow-up interviews will be carried out in 2009.

Please indicate if you are willing to take part.
The arrangements for these will be agreed in due course.

Yes ○ No ○

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE, YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE GREATLY VALUED.

N.B. The questionnaire was produced on four sheets of A4 paper and presented as a folded A3 booklet.

APPENDIX 2 – LETTER SENT WITH FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

WELTON CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Well Lane, Welton, Daventry, Northamptonshire. NN11 2JZ
Tel: (01327) 703177 Fax: (01327) 301864
Headteacher: Mrs YJ Watts MEd
E-Mail: head@welton-ce.northants-ecl.gov.uk

September 2008

HEADTEACHER OFSTED SURVEY – BY A HEAD FOR HEADS

Dear Colleague,

'NOT ANOTHER QUESTIONNAIRE?!'

I hear you ask, but please take the time to read about this valuable research into the workload and accountability of headteachers in primary schools. It does not come with any official or governmental remit, but is designed to find out what you really think and believe about the inspection system.

I am a serving primary head and am also studying with The Open University for a Doctorate in Education award – bit of a glutton for punishment!

'WHY CHOOSE ME TO COMPLETE YOUR SURVEY?!'

I hear another echo. Well, we actually have a lot in common in that both of our schools were subject to an Ofsted Section 5 Inspection in November of 2006, so I am presuming that we will be at a similar stage in school self-evaluation. Even if you weren't the head at your school during the inspection, I would still love to hear from you.

My research project focuses on the changes to the role of primary headteachers, specifically in relation to our accountability and autonomy since the changes to Ofsted expectations, which were introduced in 2005. I am particularly interested in primary headteachers' views about self-evaluation, the completion of the SEF and how shorter notice inspections may have impacted on your responsibilities.

I obtained your details from the Ofsted website – you may be interested to know that almost 800 English primary schools were inspected in the same month that our schools were, almost two years ago.

I can assure you total confidentiality if you choose to complete the survey. The questionnaires are numbered so that I can track returns, but this information will not be stored with the initial database compiled from the Ofsted website information. At no stage in my research will anyone be able to identify a particular school or individual – so please be honest, it will make my analysis much more meaningful.

Enclosed is a questionnaire for you to hopefully complete and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope supplied. It should take approximately **15-20 minutes** of your valuable time, but I hope you agree it is a worthwhile topic. I realise that you have many demands on your time and a mountain of paperwork, but a high level of response will make my research all the more valuable. Typically, questionnaires receive approximately a 25% return – PLEASE help me to greatly exceed this!

I sincerely hope you feel that the research focus is of real relevance, and that the findings should benefit headteachers everywhere. I certainly plan to make the results of my research public, which could even help to inform future decisions by Ofsted.

Again, I assure you that your responses will have complete confidentiality, and you will not be able to be identified at any point in the research. There is a space for you to add your details if you wish to, but there is no necessity for this.

I am enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for your convenience. I promise not to send countless reminders, as an individual researcher, I don't have either the time or the money to do so.

I very much look forward to hearing from you in the near future and can promise you that I will greatly value every completed response.

Best wishes

Yvonne Watts

APPENDIX 3 – LIST OF OFSTED REGIONAL INSPECTION PROVIDERS (RISPs) AS AT AUGUST 2008

OFSTED REGIONAL INSPECTION PROVIDERS

Accessed from Ofsted website. (Ofsted 2009b)

CAMBRIDGE EDUCATION (CE)

East Midlands

Norfolk

Cambridgeshire

Lincolnshire

Suffolk

Essex

Nottinghamshire

Rutland

Derbyshire

Bedfordshire

CfBT THE CENTRE FOR BRITISH TEACHERS (CB)

Cheshire

Warrington

Greater Merseyside

Greater Manchester

North Yorkshire

West Yorkshire

South Yorkshire

NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION (NA)

East Riding of Yorkshire

Cumbria

Northumbria

County Durham

Humberside

Lancashire

Tyne & Wear

THE PROSPECTS GROUP (PG)

London - North, West, Central, East & South

Milton Keynes

Buckinghamshire

Oxfordshire

Berkshire

Hampshire

Isle Of Wight

Surrey

TRIBAL GROUP (TG)

Birmingham

Solihull

Worcestershire

Hertfordshire

Wolverhampton

Coventry

Dudley

Sandwell

Walsall

Warwickshire

Shropshire

Staffordshire

Telford & Wrekin

Stoke-on-Trent

Kent

Sussex

Northamptonshire

Leicestershire

Somerset

Devon

Cornwall

Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole

Wiltshire

Gloucestershire

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APPENDIX 4 – LIST OF BASIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS PREPARED FOR THE INTERVIEWS

1. What issues affect your role considerably?

2. What does Ofsted mean to you?

3. How much does Ofsted impact on your day-to-day life?

4. Do you feel you have autonomy to carry out self-evaluation?

5. To whom do you feel accountable?

6. Do you feel your own approach has any impact on the inspection system?

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